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TRIUMPHANT CERTAINTIES

TRIUMPHANT CERTAINTIES

AND OTHER SERMONS by

Alexander Maclaren D.D.

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TRIUMPHANT CERTAINTIES.—I.

"We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not."—1 JOHN v. 18.

JOHN closes his letter with a series of triumphant certainties, which he considers as certified to every Christian by his own experience. "We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not . . . we know that we are of God . . . and we know that the Son of God is come." Now, that knowledge which he thus follows out on these three lines is not merely an intellectual conviction, but it is the outcome of life, and the broad seal of experimental possession is stamped upon it. Yet the average Christian reads this text, and shrugs his shoulders and says, "Well! perhaps I do not understand it, but, so far as I do, it seems to me to say a thing which is contradicted by the whole experience of life." "We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not"; and some of us are driven by such words, and parallel ones which occur in other places, to a presumptuous over-confidence, and some of us to an equally unscriptural despondency; and a great many of us to laying John's triumphant certainty up upon the shelf where the unintelligible things are getting covered over with dust.

So I wish, in this sermon, to try, if I can, to come to the understanding, that in some measure I may help you to come to the joyful possession, of the truth which lies here, and which the Apostle conceives to belong to the very elements of the Christian character.

I. First, then, I ask the question—of whom is the Apostle speaking here?

"We know that whosoever is born of God"—or, as the Revised Version reads it, "*begotten* of God"—"sinneth not." Now we must go back a little—and sometimes to go a long way from a subject is the best way to get at it. Let me recall to you the Master's words with which He all but began His public ministry, when He said to Nicodemus, "Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." There is the root of all that this epistle is so full of, the conception of a regeneration, a being born again, which makes men, by a new birth, sons of God, in a fashion and in a sphere of their nature in which they were not the sons of the Heavenly Father before that experience. Jesus Christ laid down, as the very first principle which He would insist upon, to a man who was groping in the midst of mere legal conceptions of righteousness as the work of his own hands, this principle,—there must be a radical change, and there must be the entrance into every human nature of a new life-principle before there is any vision, any possession of, or any entrance into, that region in which the will of God is supreme, and where He reigns and rules as King. John is only echoing his Master when he here, and in other places of this letter, lays all the stress, in regard to practical righteousness and to noble character, upon being born

again, subjected to that change which is fairly paralleled with the physical fact of birth, and has, as its result, the possession by the man who passes through it of a new nature, sphered in and destined to dominate and cleanse his old self.

Then there is a further step to be taken, and that is that this sonship of God, which is the result of being born again, is mediated and received by us through our faith. Remember the prologue of John's gospel, where, as a great musician will hint all his subsequent themes in his overture, he gathers up in one all the main threads and points of his teaching. There he says, "To as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God." Long years afterwards, when an old man in Ephesus, he writes down in this last chapter of his first epistle the same truth which he there set blazing in the forefront of his gospel when he says, in the first verse of this chapter, "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God." On condition, then, of a man's faith in Jesus Christ, there is communicated to him a new life direct from God, kindred with the Divine, and which dwells in him, and works in him precisely in the measure of his personal faith. That is the first point that I desire to establish.

You will remember, I suppose, that this same conception of the deepest result of the Christian faith being no mere external forgiveness of sins, nor alteration of a man's position in reference to the Divine judgments, but the communication of a new life-power and principle to him, is not the property of the mystic John only, but it is the property likewise of the legal James, who says, "Of His own will begat He us by the word of truth,

that we should be a kind of first-fruits of His creatures"; and it is set forth with great emphasis and abundance in all the writings of the Apostle Paul, who insists that we are sons through the Son, who insists that the gift of God is a new nature, formed in righteousness "after the image of Him that created Him," and who is ever dwelling upon the necessity that this new nature should be cultivated and increased by the faith and effort of its recipient.

Keeping these things in mind, I take the second step, and that is that this new birth, and the new Divine life which is its result, co-exist along with the old nature in which it is planted, and which it has to coerce and subdue, sometimes to crucify, and always to govern. For I need not remind you that if the analogy of birth is to be followed, we have to recognise that that Divine life, too, like the physical life, which is also God's gift, has to pass through stages; and that just as the perfect man, God manifest in the flesh, "increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man," so the Divine life in a soul comes to it in germ, and has its period of infancy and growth up into youth and manhood. This apostle puts great emphasis upon that idea of advancement in the Divine life. For you remember the long passage in which he twice reiterates the notion of the stages of children and young men and fathers. So the new life has to grow, grow in its own strength, grow in its sphere of influence, grow in the power with which it purges and hallows the old nature in the midst of which it is implanted. But growth is not the only word for its development. That new nature has to fight for its life. There must be effort, in order that it may

rule; there must be strenuous and continuous diligence, directed not only to strengthen it, but to weaken its antagonist, in order that it may spread and permeate the whole nature. Thus we have the necessary foundation laid for that which characterises the Christian life, from the beginning to the end, that it is a working out of that which is implanted, a working out, with ever-widening area of influence, and a working in with ever deeper and more thorough power of transforming the character. There may be indefinite approximation to the entire suppression and sanctification of the old man; and whatsoever is born of God manifests its Divine kindred in this, that sooner or later it overcomes the world.

Now, if all that which I have been saying is true—and to me it is undeniably so—I come to a very plain answer to the first question that I raised: Who is it that John is speaking about? "Whosoever is born of God" is the Christian man, in so far as the Divine life which he has from God by fellowship with His Son, through His own personal faith, has attained the supremacy in Him. The Divine nature that is in a man is that which is born of God. And that the Apostle does not mean the man in whom that nature is implanted, whether he is true to the nature or no, is obvious from the fact that, in another part of this same chapter he substitutes "*what*soever" for "*who*soever," as if he would have us mark that the thing which he declares to be victorious and sinless is not so much the person as the power that is lodged in the person. That is my answer to the first question.

II. What is asserted about this Divine life?

"Whosoever is born of God sinneth not." That is by

no means a unique expression in this letter. For, to say nothing about the general drift of it, we have a precisely similar statement in a previous chapter, twice uttered. "Whosoever abideth in Him sinneth not"; "whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin, for His seed remaineth in him, and he cannot sin, because he is born of God." Nothing can be stronger than that. Yes, and nothing can be more obvious. I think, then, that the Apostle does not thereby mean to declare that, unless a man is absolutely sinless in regard of his individual acts, he has not that Divine life in him. For look at what precedes our text. Just before he has said, and it is the saying which leads him to my text, "If any man seeth his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life." So, then, he contemplated that within the circle of sons of God, who were each other's brethren because they were all possessors of that Divine birth, there would exist "sin not unto death," which demanded a brother's brotherly intercession and help. And do you suppose that any man, in the very same breath in which he thus declared that brotherhood was to be manifested by the way in which we help a brother to get rid of his sins, would have stultified himself by a blank, staring contradiction such as has been extracted from the words of my text? I say nothing about inspiration; I only say common-sense forbids it. The fact of the matter is that John, in his simple, child-like way, does not wait to concatenate his ideas, or to show how the one limits and explains the other, but he lays them down before us, and the fact of their juxtaposition limits, and he does not expect that his readers are quite fools. So he says in the one breath,

"If any man see his brother sin a sin," and in the next breath, "Whosoever is born of God sinneth not." Surely there is a way to bring these two sayings into harmony. And it seems to me to be the way that I have been suggesting to you—viz., to take the text to mean—not that a Christian is, or must be, in order to vindicate his right to be called a Christian, sinless, but that there is a power in him, a life-principle in him which is sinless, and whatsoever in him is born of God overcometh the world and "sinneth not."

Now, then, that seems to me to be the extent of the Apostle's affirmation here; and I desire to draw two plain, practical conclusions. One is, that this notion of a Divine life-power, lodged in, and growing through, and fighting with the old nature, makes the hideousness and the criminality of a Christian man's transgressions more hideous and more criminal. The teaching of my text has sometimes been used in the very opposite direction. I do not need to say anything about that. There have been people that have said "It is no more *I*, but *sin*, that dwelleth in me; *I* am not responsible." There have been types of so-called Christianity which have used this loftiest and purest thought of my text as a minister of sin. I do not suppose that there are any representatives of that caricature and travesty here, so I need not say a word about it. The opposite inference is what I urge now. In addition to all the other foulnesses which attach to any man's lust, or lechery, or drunkenness, or ambition, or covetousness, this super-eminent brand and stigma is burned in upon yours and mine, Christian men and women, that it is dead against, absolutely inconsistent with, the principle of life that is bedded within

us. And whilst all men, by every transgression, flout God and degrade themselves, the Christian man who comes down to the level of living for flesh and sense and time and self, has laid the additional and heaviest of all weights of guilt upon his back in that he has done despite to the Spirit of grace, and grieved and contradicted and thwarted the life of God that is within him. The deepest guilt and the darkest condemnation attach to the sins of the man who, with a Divine life in his spirit, obeys the flesh. "To whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required."

Another consideration may fairly be urged as drawn from this text, and that is that the one task of Christians ought to be to deepen and to strengthen the life of God, which is in their souls, by faith. There is no limit, except one of my own making, to the extent to which my whole being may be penetrated through and through and ruled absolutely by that new life which God has given.

> 'Tis life, more life, for which we pant,
> 'Tis life whereof our veins are scant.

It is all very well to cultivate specific and sporadic virtues and graces. Get a firmer hold and a fuller possession of the life of Christ in your own souls, and all graces and virtues will come.

III. Now, I have one last question—what is the ground of John's assertion about him "that is born of God"?

My text runs on "but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself." If any of you are using the Revised Version, you will see a change there, small in extent,

but large in significance. It reads, "He that is begotten of God keepeth him." And although at this stage of my sermon it would be absurd in me to enter upon exegetical considerations, let me just say in a sentence that the original has considerable variation in expression in these two clauses, which variation makes it impossible, I think, to adopt the idea contained in the Authorised Version, that the same person is referred to in both clauses. The difference is this. In the first clause, "He that is begotten of God" is the Christian man; in the second, "He that is begotten of God" is Christ the Saviour.

There is the guarantee that "Whosoever is begotten of God sinneth not," because round his weakness is cast the strong defence of the Elder Brother's hand; and the Son of God keeps all the sons who, through Him, have derived into their natures the life of God. If, then, they are kept by the only begotten Son of the Father, who, that "He might bring many sons unto glory," has Himself worn the likeness of our flesh apart from sin, then the one thing for us to do, in order to nourish and deepen and strengthen, and bring to sovereign power in our poor natures that previous and enduring principle of life, is to take care that we do not run away from the keeping hand nor wander far from the only safety. When a little child is sent out for a walk by the parent with an elder brother, if it goes staring into shop-windows, and gaping at anything that it sees upon the road, and loses hold of the brother's hand, it is lost, and breaks into tears, and can only be consoled and secured by being brought back. Then the little fingers clasp round the larger hand, and there is a sense of relief and of safety.

Dear brethren, if we stray away from Christ we lose ourselves in muddy ways. If we keep near Him, as merchantmen in time of war keep near the men-of-war convoy, or as pilgrims across a dangerous desert keep close to the heels of the horses of their escort, "that wicked one toucheth us not." And so we may be sure that "that which is born of God" will come to the sovereign power within us, and He that was born of the Spirit will cast out him that was born of the flesh.

TRIUMPHANT CERTAINTIES.—II.

"We know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness."—1 JOHN v. 19.

THIS is the second of the triumphant certainties which John supposes to be the property of every Christian. You may remember that I spoke about the first of them in my last sermon. It reads, "We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not." Now, there is a distinct connection and advance, as between these two statements. The former of them is entirely general. It is particularised in my text; the "whosoever" there is pointed into "we" here. The individuals who have the right to claim these prerogatives are none other than the body of Christian people.

Then there is another connection and advance. "Born of God" refers to an act; "of God" to a state. The point is produced into a line. There is still another connection and advance. "Whosoever is born of God sinneth not," "and that wicked one toucheth him not." That glance at a dark surrounding, from which he that is born of God is protected, is deepened in my text into a vision of the whole world as lying in the "wicked one."

Now, I know that sayings like this of my text, which

put into the forefront the Christian prerogative, and which regard mankind, apart from the members of Christ's body, as in a dark condition of subjection under an alien power, have often been spoken of as if they were presumptuous, on the one hand, and narrow, uncharitable, and gloomy on the other. I am not concerned to deny that, on the lips of some professing Christian, they have had a very ugly sound, and have ministered to distinctly un-Christlike sentiments. But, on the other hand, I do believe that there are few things which the average Christianity of to-day wants more than a participation in that joyous confidence and buoyant energy which throb in the Apostle's words ; and that for lack of this triumphant certitude many a soul has been lamed, its joy clouded, its power trammelled, and its work in the world thwarted. So I wish to try to catch some of that solemn and joyous confidence which the Apostle peals forth in these triumphant words.

I. I ask you, then, to look first at the Christian certainty of belonging to God.

"We know that we are of God." Where did John get that form of expression, which crops up over and over again in his letter? He got it where he got most of his terminology, from the lips of the Master. For, if you remember, our Lord Himself speaks more than once of men being "of God." As, for instance, when He says, "He that is of God heareth God's words. Ye therefore hear them not because ye are not of God." And then He goes on to give the primary idea that is conveyed in the phrase when He says, in strong contrast to that expression, "Ye are of your father, and the lusts of your father ye will do." So, then,

plainly, as I said, what was a point in the previous certitude, is here prolonged into a line, and expresses a permanent state.

The first conception in the phrase is that of life derived, communicated from God Himself. Fathers of the flesh communicate life, and it is thenceforth independent. But the life of the Spirit, which we draw from God, is only sustained by the continual repetition of the same gift by which it was originated. So the second idea that lies in the expression is that of a life dependent upon him from whom it originally comes. The better life in the Christian soul is as certain to fade and die if the supply from Heaven is cut off or dammed back, as is the bed of a stream to become parched and glistering in the fierce sunshine, if the head-waters flow into it no more. You can no more have the life of the Spirit in the spirit of a man without continual communication from Him than a sunbeam can subsist if it be cut off from the central source. Therefore, the second of the ideas in this expression is, the continual dependence of that derived life upon God. Christian people are "of God," in so far as they partake of that new life, in an altogether special sense, which has a feeble analogy in the dependence of all creation upon the continual effluence of the Divine power. Preservation is a continual creation, and unless God operated in all physical phenomena and change there would neither be phenomena, nor change, nor substance which could show them forth. But high above all that is the dependence of the renewed soul upon Him for the continual communication of His gifts and life.

If that life is thus derived and dependent, there

follows the last idea in our pregnant phrase—viz., that it is correspondent with its source. "Ye are of God," kindred with Him and developing a life which, in its measure, being derived and dependent, is cognate with, and assimilated to, his own. This is the prerogative of every Christian soul.

Then there is another step to be taken. The man that has that life *knows* it. "We know," says the Apostle, "that we are of God." That word "know" has been usurped, or at all events illegitimately monopolised by certain forms of knowledge. But surely the inward facts of my own consciousness are as much facts, and are certified to me as validly and reliably as are facts in other regions which are attested by the senses, or arrived at by reasoning. Christian people have the same right to lay hold of that great word, "we know," and to apply it to the facts of their spiritual experience, as any scientist in the world has to apply it to the facts of his science. I do not for a moment forget the differences between the two kinds of knowledge, but I do feel that in regard of certitude the advantage is at least shared, and some of us would say that we are surer of ourselves than we are of anything besides. How do you know that you *are* at all? The only answer is, "I feel that I am." And precisely the same evidence applies in regard to these lofty thoughts of a Divine kindred and a spiritual life. I know that I am of God. I have passed through experiences, and I am aware of consciousnesses which certify that to me.

But that is not all. For, as I tried to show in my last sermon, the condition of being "born of God" is laid plainly down in this very chapter by the Apostle, as

being the simple act of faith in Jesus Christ. So, then, if any man is sure that he believes, he knows that he is born of God, and is of God.

But you say, "do you not know that men deceive themselves by a profession of being Christians, and that many of us estimate their professions at a very different rate of genuineness from what they estimate them at?" Yes! I know that. And this whole letter of John goes to guard us against the presumption of entertaining inflated thoughts about ourselves as being kindred with God, unless we verify the consciousness by certain plain facts. You remember how continually in this epistle there crops up by the side of the most thorough-going mysticism, as people call it, the plainest, home-spun, practical morality, and how all these lofty, towering thoughts are brought down to this sharp test, "Let no man deceive you; he that doeth not righteousness is not of God; neither he that loveth not his brother." That is a test which, applied to many a fanatical dream, shrivels it up.

There is another test which the Master laid down in the words that I have quoted already, for another purpose, when He said, "He that is of God heareth God's words. Ye, therefore, hear them not because ye are not of God." Christian people, take these two plain tests—first, righteousness of life, common practical morality, the doing and the loving to do, the things that all the world recognises to be right and true; and, second, an ear attuned and attent to catch God's voice—and control your consciousness of being God's son by these, and you will not go far wrong.

And now, before I go further, one word. It is a shame,

and a laming and a weakening of any Christian life, that this triumphant confidence should not be clear in it. "We *know* that we are of God." Can you and I echo that with calm confidence? "I sometimes half hope that I am." "I am almost afraid to say it." "I do not know whether I am or not." "I trust I may be." That is the kind of creeping attitude in which hosts of Christian people are contented to live; and they stare at a man as if he was presumptuous, and soaring up into a region that they do not know anything about, when he humbly echoes the Apostle, and says, "We know that we are God's." Why should our skies be as grey and sunless as those of a northern winter's day when all the while, away down on the sunny seas, to which we may voyage if we will, there are unbroken sunshine, ethereal blue, and a perpetual blaze of light? Christian men and women! it concerns the power of your lives, their progress in holiness, and their possession of peace, that you should be far more able than, alas! many of us are, to say, and that without presumption, "We know that we are of God."

II. We have here the Christian view of the surrounding world.

I need not, I suppose, remind you that John learned from Jesus to use that phrase "the world," not as meaning the aggregate of material things, but as meaning the aggregate of godless men. If you want a modern translation of the word, it comes very near a familiar one with us nowadays, and that is "Society"; the mass of people that are not of God.

Now, the more a man is conscious that he himself, by faith in Jesus Christ, has passed into the family of God,

and possesses the life that comes from Him, the more keen will be his sense of the evil that lies round him, and of the contrast between the maxims and prevalent practices and institutions and ways of the world, and those which belong to Christ and Christ's people. Just as a native of Central Africa, brought to England for a while, when he gets back to his kraal, will see its foulnesses and its sordidnesses as he did not before, or as, according to old stories, those that were carried away into fairyland for a little while came back to the work-a-day life of the world, and felt themselves alien from it, and had visions of what they had seen ever floating before them; so the measure of our conscious belonging to God is the measure of our perception of the contrast between us and the ways of the men about us.

I am not concerned for a moment to deny, rather, I most thankfully recognise the truth, that a great deal of "the world" has been ransomed by the Cross, by which its prince has been cast out, and that much of Christian morality, and of the Christian way of looking at things, has passed into the general atmosphere in which we live, so as that, between the true Christian community and the surrounding world in which it is plunged, there is less antagonism than there was when John in Ephesus wrote these words beneath the shadow of Diana's temple. But the world is a world still, and the antagonism is there; and if a man will live true to the life of God that is in him, he will find out soon enough that the gulf is not bridged over. It never will be bridged. The only way by which the antagonism can be ended is for the kingdoms of this world to become the kingdoms of our God and of His Christ. Society is not of God, and the

institutions of every nation upon earth have still in them much of the evil one. Christian people are set down in the midst of these, and the antagonism is perennial.

III. Lastly, consider the consequent Christian duty.

Let me put two or three plain exhortations. I beseech you, Christian people, cultivate the sense of belonging to a higher order than that in which you dwell. A man in a heathen land loses his sense of home, and of its ways; and it needs a perpetual effort in order that we should not forget our true affinities. "We are of God" may be so said as to be the parent of all manner of un-Christlike sentiments, as I have already remarked. It may be the mother of contempt and self-righteousness, and a hundred other vices; but, rightly said, it has no such tendency. But unless we are ever and anon seeking to renew that consciousness, it will fade and become dim, and we shall forget the imperial palace whence we came, and be content to live in the barren fields of the citizens of that country, and even to feed upon the husks that are in the swine's trough. So I say, cultivate the sense of belonging to God.

Again, I say, be careful to avoid infection. Go as men do in a plague-stricken city. Go as our soldiers in that Ashanti expedition had to go, on your guard against malaria, the "pestilence that walketh in darkness," and smites ere we are aware, bringing down our notions, our views of life, our thoughts of duty, to the low level of the people around us. Go as these same soldiers did, on the watch for ambuscades and lurking enemies behind the trees. And remember that the only safety is keeping hold of Christ's hand.

Look on the world as Christ looked on it. There must be no contempt; there must be no self-righteous-

ness; there must be no pluming ourselves on our own prerogatives. There must be sorrow caught from Him, and tenderness of pity, like that which forced itself to His eyes as He gazed across the valley at the city sparkling in the sunshine, or such as wrung His heart when He looked upon the multitude as sheep without a shepherd.

Work for the deliverance of your brethren from the alien tyrant. Notice the difference between the two clauses in the text. "We are *of* God"; that is a permanent relation. "The world lieth *in* the wicked one;" that is not necessarily a permanent relation. The world is not *of* the wicked one; it is "*in*" him, and that may be altered. It is in the sphere of that dark influence. As in the old stories, knights hung their dishonoured arms upon trees, and laid their heads in the lap of an enchantress, so men have departed from God, and surrendered themselves to the fascinations and the control of an alien power. But the world may be taken out of the sphere of influence in which it lies. And that is what you are here for. "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil"; and for that purpose He has called us to be His servants. So the more we feel the sharp contrast between the blessedness of the Divine life which we believe ourselves to possess, and the darkness and evils of the world that lies around us, the more should sorrow, and the more should sympathy, and the more should succour be ours. Brethren, for ourselves let us remember that we cannot better help the world to get away from the alien tyrant that rules it than by walking in the midst of men, with the aureola of this joyful confidence and certitude around us.

The solemn alternative opens before every one of us—Either I am "of God," or I am "in the wicked one." Dear friends, let us lay our hearts and hands in Christ's care, and then that will be true of us which this Apostle declares for the whole body of believers: "Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome, because greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world."

TRIUMPHANT CERTAINTIES.—III.

"And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know Him that is true, and we are in Him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ."—1 JOHN v. 20.

ONCE more John triumphantly proclaims "We know." Whole-souled conviction rings in his voice. He is sure of his footing. He does not say "We incline to think," or even "We believe and firmly hold," but he says "We know." A very different tone that from that of many of us, who, influenced by currents of present opinions, feel as if what was rock to our fathers had become quagmire to us! But John in his simplicity thinks that it is a tone which is characteristic of every Christian. I wonder what he would say about some Christians now.

This third of his triumphant certainties is connected closely with the two preceding ones, which have been occupying us in former sermons. It is so, as being in one aspect the ground of these, for it is because "the Son of God is come" that men are born of God, and are of Him. It is so in another way also, for properly the words of our text ought to read not "*And* we know," rather "*But* we know." They are suggested, that is to say, by the preceding words, and they present the only thought which makes them tolerable. "The whole world

lieth in the wicked one. But we know that the Son of God is come." Falling back on the certainty of the Incarnation and its present issues, we can look in the face the grave condition of humanity, and still have hope for the world and for ourselves. The certainty of the Incarnation *and its issues*, I say. For in my text John not only points to the past fact that Christ has come in the flesh, but to a present fact, the operation of that Christ upon Christian souls—"He hath given us an understanding." And not only so, but he points, further, to a dwelling in God and God in us as being the abiding issue of that past manifestation. So these three things —the coming of Christ, the knowledge of God which flows into a believing heart through that Incarnate Son, and the dwelling in God which is the climax of all His gifts to us—these three things are in John's estimation certified to a Christian heart, and are not merely matters of opinion and faith, but matters of knowledge.

Ah! brethren, if our Christianity had that firm strain, and was conscious of that verification, it would be less at the mercy of every wind of doctrine; it would be less afraid of every new thought; it would be more powerful to rule and to calm our own spirits, and it would be more mighty to utter persuasive words to others. We must *know* for ourselves, if we would lead others to believe. So I desire to look now at these three points which emerge from my text, and

I. I would deal with the Christian's knowledge that the Son of God is come.

Now, our Apostle is writing to Asiatic Christians of the second generation at the earliest, most of whom had not been born when Jesus Christ was upon earth, and

none of whom had any means of acquaintance with Him except that which we possess—the testimony of the witnesses who had companied with Him. And yet, to these men—whose whole contact with Christ and the Gospel was, like yours and mine, the result of hearsay—he says, "We know." Was he misusing words in his eagerness to find a firm foundation for a soul to rest on? Many would say that he was, and would answer this certainty of his with "We *know*"; how *can* you know? You may go on the principle that probability is the guide of life, and you may be morally certain, but the only way by which you know a fact is by having seen it; and even if you have seen Jesus Christ, all that you saw would be the life of a man upon earth whom you believed to be the Son of God. It is trifling with language to talk about knowledge when you have only testimony to build on.

Well! there is a great deal to be said on that side, but there are two or three considerations which, I think, amply warrant the Apostle's declaration here, and our understanding of his words, "We know," in their fullest and deepest sense. Let me just mention these briefly. Remember that when John says "The Son of God is come" he is not speaking—as his language, if any of you can consult the original, distinctly shows—about a past fact only, but about a fact which, beginning in a historical past, is permanent and continuous. In one aspect, no doubt, Jesus Christ had come and gone, before any of the people to whom this letter was addressed heard it for the first time, but in another aspect, if I may use a colloquial expression, when Jesus Christ came, He "came to stay." And that thought, of the permanent

abiding with men, of the Christ who once was manifest in the flesh for thirty years, and

> Walked the acres of those blessed fields
> For our advantage,

runs through the whole of Scripture. Nor shall we understand the meaning of Christ's Incarnation unless we see in it the point of beginning of a permanent reality. He has come, and He has *not* gone—"Lo! I am with you alway"—and that thought of the fulness and permanence of our Lord's presence with Christian souls is lodged deep and all-pervading, not only in John's gospel, but in the whole teaching of the New Testament. So it is a present fact, and not only a past piece of history, which is asserted when the Apostle says "The Son of God is come." And a man who has a companion knows that he has him, and by many a token not only of flesh but of spirit, is conscious that he is not alone, but that the dear and strong one is by his side. Such consciousness belongs to all the maturer and deeper forms of the Christian life.

Further, we must read on in my text if we are to find all which John declares to be a matter of knowledge. "The Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding." I shall have a word or two more to say about that presently, but in the meantime I simply point out that what is here declared to be known by the Christian soul is a present operation of the present Christ upon his nature. If a man is aware that, through his faith in Jesus Christ, new perceptions and powers of discerning solid reality where he only saw mist before have been granted to him, the Apostle's triumphant assertion is vindicated.

And, still further, the words of my text, in their assurance of possessing something far more solid than an opinion or a creed, in Christ Jesus and our relation to Him, are warranted, on the consideration that the growth of the Christian life largely consists in changing belief that rests on testimony into knowledge grounded in vital experience. At first a man accepts Jesus Christ because, for one reason or another, he is led to give credence to the evangelical testimony and to the apostolic teaching: but as he goes on learning more and more of the realities of the Christian life, creed changes into consciousness; and we can turn round to apostles and prophets, and say to them, with thankfulness for all that we have received from them, "Now we believe, not because of your saying, but because we have seen Him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world." That is the advance which Christian men should all make, from the infantile, rudimentary days, when they accepted Christ on the witness of others, to the time when they accepted Him because, in the depth of their own experience they have found Him to be all that they took Him to be. The true test of creed is life. The true way of knowing that a shelter is adequate is to house in it, and be defended from the pelting of every pitiless storm. The medicine we know to be powerful when it has cured us. And every man that truly grasps Jesus Christ, and is faithful and persevering in his hold, can set his seal to that which to others is but a thing believed on hearsay, and accepted on testimony.

"We know that the Son of God is come." Christian people, have you such a first-hand acquaintance with

the articles which constitute your Christian creed as that? Over and above all the intellectual reasons which may lead to the acceptance, as a theory, of the truths of Christianity; have you that living experience of them which warrants you in saying "We know"? Alas! Alas! I am afraid that this supreme ground of certitude is rarely trodden by multitudes of professing Christians. And so in days of criticism and upheaval they are frightened out of their wits, and all but out of their faith, and are nervous and anxious lest from this corner or that corner or the other corner of the field of honest study and research, there may come some sudden shock that will blow the whole fabric of their belief to pieces. "He that believeth shall not make haste," and a man who *knows* what Christ has done for him may calmly welcome the advent of any new light, sure that nothing that can be established, can touch that serene centre in which his certitude sits enshrined and calm. Brother, do you seek to be able to say, "I know in whom I have believed."

II. Note the new power of knowing God given by the Son who is come.

John says that one issue of that Incarnation and permanent presence of the Lord Christ with us is that "He hath given us an understanding that we may know Him that is true." Now, I do not suppose that he means thereby that any absolutely new faculty is conferred upon men, but that new direction is given to old ones, and dormant powers are awakened. Just as in the miracles of our Lord the blind men had eyes, but it needed the touch of His finger before the sight came to them, so man, that was made in the image of God,

which he has not altogether lost by any wandering, has therein lying dormant and oppressed the capacity of knowing Him from whom he comes, but he needs the couching hand of the Christ Himself, in order that the blind eyes may be capable of seeing and the slumbering power of perception be awakened. That gift of a clarified nature, a pure heart, which is the condition, as the Master Himself said, of seeing God—that gift is bestowed upon all who, trusting in the Incarnate Son, submit themselves to His cleansing hand.

In the Incarnation Jesus Christ gave us God to see; by His present work in our souls He gives us the power to see God. The knowledge of which my text speaks is the knowledge of "Him that is true," by which pregnant word the Apostle means to contrast the Father whom Jesus Christ sets before us with all men's conceptions of a Divine nature; and to declare that whilst these conceptions, in one way or another, fall beneath or diverge from reality and fact, our God manifested to us by Jesus Christ is the only One whose nature corresponds to the name, and who is essentially that which is included in it.

But what I would dwell on especially for a moment is that this gift, thus given by the Incarnate and present Christ, is not an intellectual gift only, but something far deeper. Inasmuch as the Apostle declares that the object of this knowledge is not a truth about God but God Himself, it necessarily follows that the knowledge is such as we have of a person, and not of a doctrine. Or, to put it into simpler words: to know *about* God is one thing, and to know God is quite another. We may know all about the God that Christ has revealed

and yet not know Him in the very slightest degree. To know about God is theology, to know Him is religion. You are not a bit better, though you comprehend the whole sweep of Christ's revelation of God, if the God whom you in so far comprehend remain a stranger to you. That we may know Him as a man knows his friend, and that we may enter into relations of familiar acquaintance with Him, Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, and this is the blessing that He gives us—not an accurate theology, but a loving friendship. Has Christ done that for you, my brother?

That knowledge, if it is real and living, will be progressive. More and more we shall come to know. As we grow like Him we shall draw closer to Him; as we draw closer to Him we shall grow like Him. So the Christian life is destined to an endless progress, like one of those mathematical spirals which ever climb, ever approximate to, but never reach, the summit and the centre of the coil. So, if we have Christ for our medium both of light and of sight, if He both gives us God to see and the power to see Him, we shall begin a course which eternity itself will not witness completed. We have landed on the shores of a mighty continent, and for ever and for ever and ever we shall be pressing deeper and deeper into the bosom of the land, and learning more and more of its wealth and loveliness. "We know that we know Him that is true." If the Son of God has come to us, we know God, and we know that we know Him. Do you?

III. Lastly, note here the Christian indwelling of God, which is possible through the Son who is come.

Friendship, familiar intercourse, intimate knowledge

as of one with whom we have long dwelt, instinctive sympathy of heart and mind, are not all which, in John's estimation, Jesus Christ brings to them that love Him, and live in Him. For he adds, "We are *in* Him that is true." Of old Abraham was called the Friend of God, but an auguster title belongs to us. "Know ye not that ye are the temples of the living God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" Oh! brethren, do not be tempted, by any dread of mysticism, to deprive yourselves of that crown and summit of all the gifts and blessings of the Gospel, but open your hearts and your minds to expect and to believe in the actual abiding of the Divine nature in us. Mysticism? Yes! And I do not know what religion is worth if there is not mysticism in it, for the very heart of it seems to me to be the possible interpenetration and union of man and God—not in the sense of obliterating the personalities, but in the deep, wholesome sense in which Christ Himself and all His apostles taught it, and in which every man who has had any profound experience of the Christian life feels it to be true.

But notice the words of my text for a moment, where the Apostle goes on to explain and define how "we are in Him that is true," because we are "in His Son Jesus Christ." That carries us away back to "Abide in Me, and I in you." John caught the whole strain of such thoughts from those sacred words in the upper room. Christ in us is the deepest truth of Christianity. And that God is in us, if Christ is in us, is the teaching not only of my text but of the Lord Himself, when He said, "We will come unto him and make our abode with him."

And will not a man "*know*" that? Will it not be something deeper and better than intellectual perception by which he is aware of the presence of the Christ in his heart? Cannot we all have it if we will? There is only one way to it, and that is by simple trust in Jesus Christ. Then, as I said, the trust with which we began will not leave us, but will be glorified into experience with which the trust will be enriched.

Brethren, the sum and substance of all that I have been trying to say is just this: lay your poor personalities in Christ's hands, and lean yourselves upon Him; and there will come into your hearts a Divine power, and, if you are faithful to your faith, you will know that it is not in vain. There is a tremendous alternative, as I have already pointed out, suggested by the sequence of thoughts in my text, "the whole world lieth in the wicked one" but "we are in Him that is true." We have to choose our dwelling-place, whether we shall dwell in that dark region of evil, or whether we shall dwell in God, and know that God is in us.

If we are true to the conditions, we shall receive the promises. And then our Christian faith will not be dashed with hesitations, nor shall we be afraid lest any new light shall eclipse the Sun of Righteousness, but, in the midst of the babble of controversy, we may be content to be ignorant of much, to hold much in suspense, to part with not a little, but yet with quiet hearts to be sure of the one thing needful, and with unfaltering tongues to proclaim "We know that the Son of God is come, and we are in Him that is true."

THE LAST WORDS OF THE LAST APOSTLE.

"This is the true God, and eternal life. Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen."—1 JOHN v. 20-21.

SO the Apostle ends his letter. These words are probably not only the close of this epistle, but the last words, chronologically, of Scripture. The old man gathers together his ebbing force to sum up his life's work in a sentence, which might be remembered though much else was forgotten. Last words stick. Perhaps, too, some thought of future generations, to whom his witness might come, passed across his mind. At all events, some thought that we are here listening to the last words of the last Apostle may well be in ours. You will observe that, in this final utterance, the Apostle drops the triumphant "we know," which we have found in previous sermons reiterated with such emphasis. He does so, not because he doubted that all his brethren would gladly attest and confirm what he was about to say, but because it was fitting that his last words should be his very own; the utterance of personal experience, and weighty with it, and with Apostolic authority. So he smelts all that he had learned from Christ, and had been teaching for fifty years, into that one sentence. The feeble voice rings out clear and strong; and then softens into tremulous tones of earnest exhortation, and

almost of entreaty. The dying light leaps up in one bright flash: the lamp is broken, but the flash remains. And if we will let it shine into our lives, we shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.

I. Here we have the sum of all that we need to know about God.

"This is the true God." The first question is, what or whom does John mean by "this"?

Grammatically, we may refer the word to the immediately preceding name, Jesus Christ. But it is extremely improbable that the Apostle should so suddenly shift his point of view, as he would do if, having just drawn a clear distinction between "Him that is true," and the Christ who reveals Him, he immediately proceeded to apply the former designation to Jesus Christ Himself. It is far more in accordance with his teaching, and with the whole scope of the passage, if by "this" we understand the Father of whom he has just been speaking. It is no tautology that he reiterates in this connection that He is "true." For he has separated now his own final attestation from the common consciousness of the Christian community with which he has previously been dealing. And when he says, "This is the true God" he means to say, "This God of whom I have been affirming that Jesus Christ is His sole Revealer, and of whom I have been declaring that through Jesus Christ we may know Him and dwell abidingly in Him," "this"—and none else—"is the true God."

Then the second question that I have to answer briefly is, what does John mean by "true"? I had occasion, in a previous sermon on the foregoing words,

to point out that by that expression he means, whenever he uses it, some person or thing whose nature and character correspond to his or its name, and who is essentially and perfectly that which the name expresses. If we take that as the signification of the word, we just come to this, that the final assertion into which the old Apostle flings all his force, and which he wishes to stand out prominent as his last word to his brethren and to the world, is that the God revealed in Jesus Christ, and with whom a man through Jesus Christ may have fellowship of knowledge and friendship,—that He and none but He answers to all that men mean when they speak of a God; that He, if I might use such an expression, fully fills the part.

Brethren, if we but think that, however it comes, (no matter about that) every man has in him a capacity of conceiving of a perfect Being, of righteousness, power, purity, and love, and that all through the ages of the world's yearnings there has never been presented to it the realisation of that dim conception, but that all idolatry, all worship, has failed in bodying out a Person who would answer to the requirements of a man's spirit, then we come to the position in which these final words of the old fisherman go down to a deeper depth than all the world's wisdom, and carry a message of consolation and a true gospel to be found nowhere besides.

Whatsoever embodiments men may have tried to give to their dim conception of a God, these have been always limitations, and often corruptions, of it. And to limit or to separate is, in this case, to destroy. No pantheon can ever satisfy the soul of man who yearns for One

Person in whom all that he can dream of beauty, truth, goodness shall be ensphered. A galaxy of stars, white as the whitest spot in the Milky Way, can never be a substitute for the sun. "*This* is the true God;" and all others are corruptions, or limitations, or divisions, of the indissoluble unity.

Then, are men to go for ever and ever with "the blank misgivings of a creature, moving about in worlds not realised?" Is it true that I can fancy some one far greater than is? Is it true that my imagination can paint a nobler form than reality acknowledges? It is so, alas! unless we take John's swan-song and last testimony as true, and say:—This God, manifest in Jesus Christ, on whose heart I can lay my head, and into whose undying and unstained light I can gaze, and in whose righteousness I can participate, this God is the *real* God; no dream, no projection from my own nature, magnified and cleansed, and thrown up first from the earth that it may come down from heaven, but the reality, of whom all human imaginations are but the faint transcripts, though they be the faithful prophets.

For, consider what it is that the world owes to Jesus Christ, in its knowledge of God. Remember that to us orphaned men He has come and said, as none ever said, and showed as none ever showed; "Ye are not fatherless, there is a Father in the heavens." Consider that to the world, sunk in sense and flesh, and blotting its most radiant imaginations of the Divine by some veil and hindrance, of corporeity and materialism, He comes, and has said, "God is a Spirit." Consider that, taught of Him, this Apostle, to whom was committed the great distinction of in monosyllables preaching central truths,

and in words that a child can apprehend, setting forth the depths that eternity and angels cannot comprehend, has said, "God is Light, and in Him is no darkness at all." And consider that he has set the apex on the shining pyramid, and spoken the last word when he has told us, "God is Love." And put these four revelations together, the Father; Spirit; unsullied Light; absolutely Love; and then let us bow down and say, "Thou hast said the truth, O aged Seer. This is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us. This—and none beside—is the true God."

I know not what the modern world is to do for a God if it drifts away from Jesus Christ and His revelations. I know that it is always a dangerous way of arguing to try to force people upon alternatives, one of which is so repellent as to compel them to cling to the other. But it does seem to me that the whole progress of modern thought, with the advancement of modern physical science, and other branches of knowledge which perhaps are not yet to be called science, are all steadily converging on forcing us to this choice—will you have God in Christ, or, will you wander about in a Godless world, and for your highest certitude have to say, "Perhaps"? "This is the true God," and if we go away from Him I do not know where we are to go.

II. Here we have the sum of His gifts to us.

"This is the true God, and eternal life." Now, let us distinctly and emphatically put first that what is here declared is primarily something about God, and not about His gift to men; and that the two clauses, "the true God," and "eternal life," stand in precisely

the same relation to the preceding words, "This is." That is to say, the revelation which John would lay upon our hearts, that from it there may spring up in them a wondrous hope, is that, in His own essential self, the God revealed in Jesus Christ, and brought into living fellowship with us by Him, is "eternal life." By "eternal life" he means something a great deal more august than endless existence. He means a life which not only is not ended by time, but which is above time, and not subject to its conditions at all. Eternity is not time spun out for ever. And so we are lifted up into a region where there is little light, but where the very darkness is light, just as the curtain was the picture, in the old story of the painter.

That seems to part us utterly from God. He is "eternal life"; then, we poor creatures down here, whose being is all "cribbed, cabined, and confined" by succession, and duration, and the partitions of time, what can we have in common with Him? John answers for us. For, remember that in the earlier part of this epistle he writes that "the life was manifested, and we shew unto you that eternal life which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us," and "we declare it unto you; that ye also may have fellowship with us and our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son." So, then, strange as it is, and beyond our thoughts as it is, there may pass into creatures that very eternal life which is in God, and was manifested in Jesus. We have to think of Him because we know Him to be love, as in essence self-communicating, and whatsoever a creature can receive, a loving Father, the true God, will surely give.

But we are not left to wander about in regions of mysticism and darkness. For we know this, that however strange and difficult the thought of eternal life as possessed by a creature may be, to give it was the very purpose for which Jesus Christ came on earth. "I am that Bread of Life." "I am come that they might have life, and have it more abundantly." And we are not left to grope in doubt as to what that eternal life consists in; for He has said: "This is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent." Nor are we left in any more doubt as to that bond by which the whole fullness of this Divine gift may flow into a man's spirit. For over and over again the Master Himself has declared, "He that believeth hath everlasting life."

Thus, then, there is a life which belongs to God on His throne, a life lifted above the limitations of time, a life communicated by Jesus Christ, as the waters of some land-locked lake may flow down through a sparkling river, a life which consists in fellowship with God, a life which may be, and is, ours, on the simple condition of trusting Him who gives it, and a life which, eternal as it is, and destined to a glory all undreamed of, in that future beyond the grave, is now the possession of every man that puts forth the faith which is its condition. "He that believeth hath"—not *shall have*, in some distant future, but has to-day—"everlasting life," verily here and now. And so John lays this upon our hearts, as the ripe fruit of all his experience, and the meaning of all his message to the world, that God revealed in Christ "is the true God," and as Himself the possessor, is the source for us all, of life eternal.

III. Lastly, we have here the consequent sum of Christian effort.

"Little children, keep yourselves from idols," seeing that "this is the true God," the only One that answers to your requirements, and will satisfy your desires. Do not go rushing to these shrines of false deities that crowd every corner of Ephesus—ay! and every corner of Manchester. For what does John mean by an idol? Does he mean that barbarous figure of Diana that stood in the great temple, hideous and monstrous? No! he means anything, or any person, that comes into the heart and takes the place which ought to be filled by God, and by Him only. What I prize most, what I trust most utterly, what I should be most forlorn if I lost; what is the working aim of my life, and the hunger of my heart—that is my idol. We all know that.

Is the exhortation not needed, my brother? In Ephesus it was hard to have nothing to do with heathenism. In that ancient world their religion, though it was a superficial thing, was intertwined with daily life in a fashion that puts us to shame. Every meal had its libation, and almost every act was knit by some ceremony or other to a god. So that Christian men and women had almost to go out of the world, in order to be free from complicity in the all-pervading idol-worship. Now, although the form has changed, and the fascinations of old idolatry belong only to a certain stage in the world's culture and history, the temptation to idolatry remains just as subtle, just as all-pervasive, and the yielding to it just as absurd. You and I call ourselves Christians. We say we believe that there is nothing else, and nobody else, in the whole sweep of the universe

that can satisfy our hearts, or be what our imagination can conceive, but God only. Having said that on the Sunday, what about Monday? "They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living water, and hewed to themselves broken cisterns that can hold no water." "Little children"—for we are scarcely more mature than that—"little children, keep yourselves from idols."

And how is it to be done? "Keep yourselves." Then you can do it, and you have to make a dead lift of effort, or be sure of this—that the subtle seduction will slide into your heart, and before you know it, you will be out of God's sanctuary, and grovelling in Diana's temple. But it is not only our own effort that is needed, for just a sentence or two before, the Apostle had said: "He that is born of God"—that is, Christ—"keepeth us." So our keeping of ourselves is essentially our letting Him keep us. Stay inside the walls of the citadel, and you need not be afraid of the besiegers; go outside by letting your faith flag, and you will be captured or killed. Keep yourselves by clinging "to Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless." Make experience by fellowship with Him who is the only true God, and able to satisfy your whole nature, mind, heart, will, and these false deities, the whole rabble of them, will have no power to tempt you to bow the knee.

Brethren! here is the sum of the whole matter. There is one truth on which we can stay our hearts, one God in whom we can utterly trust, the God revealed in Jesus Christ. If we do not see Him in Christ, we shall not see Him at all, but wander about all our days in a world empty of solid reality. There is one gift which will

satisfy all our needs, the gift of eternal life in Jesus Christ. There is one practical injunction which will save us from many a heartache, and which our weakness can never afford to neglect, and that is to keep ourselves from all false worship. These golden words of my text, in their simplicity, in their depth, in their certainty, in their comprehensiveness, are worthy to be the last words of Revelation ; and to stand to all the world, through all ages, as the shining apex, or the solid foundation, or the central core of Christianity. "This"—*this*, and none else—"is the true God and eternal life. Little children, keep yourselves from idols."

THE EAGLE AND ITS BROOD.

"As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings."—DEUT. xxxii. 11.

THIS is an incomplete sentence in the Authorised Version, but really it should be rendered as a complete one; the description of the eagle's action including only the two first clauses, and (the figure being still retained) the person spoken of in the last clauses being God Himself. That is to say, it should read thus, "As an eagle stirreth up his nest, fluttereth over his young, *He* spreads abroad His wings, takes them, bears them on His pinions." That is far grander, as well as more compact, than the somewhat dragging comparison which, according to the Authorised Version, is spread over the whole verse and tardily explained, in the following, by a clause introduced by an unwarranted "So"—"the Lord alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him."

Now, of course, we all know that the original reference of these words is to the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt, and their training in the desert. In the solemn address by Jehovah at the giving of the law (Exod. xix. 4), the same metaphor is employed, and, no doubt, that passage was the source of the extended imagery here.

There we read, "Ye know what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto Myself." The meaning of the glowing metaphor, with its vivid details, is just that Jehovah brought Israel out of its fixed abode in Goshen, and trained it for mature national life by its varied desert experiences. As one of the prophets puts the same idea, "I taught Ephraim to go," where the figure of the parent bird training its callow fledglings for flight is exchanged for that of the nurse teaching a child to walk. While, then, the text primarily refers to the experience of the infant nation in the forty years' wanderings, it carries large truths about us all; and sets forth the true meaning and importance of life. There seem to me to be three thoughts here, which I desire to touch on briefly; first, a great thought about God; then an illuminating thought about the true meaning and aspect of life; and lastly a calming thought about the variety of the methods by which God carries out our training.

I. Here is a grand thought about God.

Now, it may come as something of a shock if I say that the bird that is selected for the comparison is not really the eagle, but one which, in our estimation, is of a very much lower order—viz., the carnivorous vulture. But a poetical emblem is not the less fitting, though, besides the points of resemblance, the thing which is so used has others less noble. Our modern repugnance to the vulture as feeding on carcases was probably not felt by the singer of this song. What he brings into view are the characteristics common to the eagle and the vulture; superb strength in beak and claw, keenness of vision almost incredible, magnificent sweep of pinion and

power of rapid, unwearied flight. And these characteristics, we may say, have their analogues in the Divine nature, and the emblem not unfitly shadows forth one aspect of the God of Israel, who is "fearful in praises," who is strong to destroy as well as to save, whose all-seeing eye marks every foul thing, and who often pounces on it swiftly to rend it to pieces, though the sky seemed empty a moment before.

But the action described in the text is not destructive, terrible, or fierce. The monarch of the sky busies itself with tender cares for its brood. Then, there is gentleness along with the terribleness. The strong beak and claw, the gaze that can see so far, and the mighty spread of wings that can lift it till it is an invisible speck in the blue vault, go along with the instinct of paternity: and the fledglings in the nest look up at the fierce beak and bright eyes, and know no terror. The impression of this blending of power and gentleness is greatly deepened, as it seems to me, if we notice that it is the male bird that is spoken about in the text, which should be rendered: "As the eagle stirreth up *his* nest and fluttereth over *his* young."

So we just come to the thought that we must keep the true balance between these two aspects of that great Divine nature—the majesty, the terror, the awfulness, the soaring elevation, the all-penetrating vision, the power of the mighty pinion, one stroke of which could crush a universe into nothing; and, on the other side, the yearning instinct of Fatherhood, the love and gentleness, and all the tender ministries for us, His children, to which these lead. Brethren! unless we keep hold of both of these in due equipoise, and inseparably

intertwining, we damage the one which we retain almost as much as the one which we dismiss. For there is no love like the love that is strong, and can be fierce, and there is no condescension like the condescension of Him who is the Highest, in order that He may be, and because He is ready to be, the lowest. Modern tendencies, legitimately recoiling from the one-sidedness of a past generation, are now turning away far too much from the Old Testament conceptions of Jehovah which are concentrated in that metaphor of the vulture in the sky. And thereby we destroy the love in the name of which we scout the wrath. "Infinite mercy, but I wis as infinite a justice, too." As the vulture stirreth up his nest—that is the Old Testament revelation of the terribleness and gentleness of Jehovah. "How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wing,"—that is the New Testament modification of the image. But you never could have had the New unless you first had the Old. And you are a foolish man if, in the name of the sanctity of the New, you cast away the teaching of the Old. Keep both the metaphors, and they will explain and confirm each other.

II. Here we have an illuminating thought of the meaning of life.

What is it all for? To teach us to fly, to exercise our half-fledged wings in short flights, that may prepare us for, and make it possible to take, longer ones. Every event that befalls us has a meaning beyond itself; and every task that we have to do reacts upon us, the doers, and either fits or hinders us for larger work. Life as a whole, and in its minutest detail, is worthy of God to

give, and worthy of us to possess, only if we recognise the teaching that is put into picturesque form in this text—that the meaning of all which God does to us is to train us for something greater yonder. Life as a whole is "full of sound and fury, signifying nothing" unless it is an apprenticeship training. What are we here for? To make character. That is the aim and end of all—to make character; to get experience; to learn the use of our tools. I declare it seems to me that the world had better be wiped out altogether, incontinently, unless there is a world beyond, where a man shall use the force which here he made his own. "Thou hast been faithful in a few things; behold I make thee ruler over many things." No man gets to the heart of the mystery of life or has in his hand the key which will enable him to unlock all the doors and difficulties of human experience, unless he gets to this—that it is all meant as training.

If we could only carry that clear conviction with us day by day into the little things of life, what different things these, which we call the monotonous trifles of our daily duties, would become! The things may be small and unimportant, but the way we do them is not unimportant. The same fidelity may be exercised, and must be brought to bear, in order to do the veriest trifle of our daily lives rightly, that needs to be invoked, in order to get us safely through the crises and great times of life. There are no great principles for great duties, and little ones for little duties. We have to regulate all our conduct by the same laws, life is built up of trifles, as the mica-flakes, if there be enough of them, make the Alpine summits towering thousands of feet into the blue. Character may be manifested in the great moments, but

it is made in the small ones. So, life is meant for discipline, and unless we use it for that, however much enjoyment we get out of it, we misuse it.

III. Lastly, there is here a calming thought as to the variety of God's methods with us.

"As the eagle stirreth up his nest." No doubt the callow brood are much warmer and more comfortable in the nest than when they are turned out of it. The Israelites were by no means enamoured with the prospect of leaving the flesh-pots and the onions and the farm-houses that they had got for themselves in Goshen, to tramp with their cattle through the wilderness. They went after Moses with considerable disinclination. Here we have, then, as the first thing needed, God's loving compulsion to effort. To "stir up the nest" means to make a man uncomfortable where he is;—sometimes by the prickings of his conscience, which are often the voices of God's Spirit; sometimes by changes of circumstances, either for the better or for the worse; and oftentimes by sorrows. The straw is pulled out of the nest, and it is not so comfortable to lie in; or a bit of it develops a sharp point that runs into the half-feathered skin, and makes the fledgling glad to come forth into the air. We all shrink from change. What should we do if we had it not? We should stiffen into habits that would dwarf and weaken us. We all recoil from storms. What should we do if we had not them? Sea and air would stagnate, and become heavy and putrid and pestilential, if it was not for the wild west wind and the hurtling storms. So all our changes, instead of being whimpered over; and all our sorrows, instead of being taken reluctantly, should be recognised as being what they are,

loving summonses to effort. Then their pressure would be modified, and their blessing would be secured when their purpose was served.

But the training of the father-eagle is not confined to stirring up the nest. What is to become of the young ones when they get out of it, and have never been accustomed to bear themselves up in the invisible ether about them? So "he fluttereth over his young." It is a very beautiful word that is employed here, which "flutter" scarcely gives us. It is the same word that is used in the first chapter of Genesis, about the Spirit of God "*brooding* on the face of the waters"; and it suggests how near, how all-protecting, with expanded wings the Divine Father comes to the child whose restfulness He has disturbed.

And is not that true? Had you ever trouble that you took as from Him, which did not bring that hovering presence nearer you, until you could almost feel the motion of the wing, and be brushed by it as it passed protectingly above your head? Ah, yes! Stirring the nest is meant to be the precursor of closer approach of the Father to us; and if we take our changes and our sorrows as loving summonses from Him to effort, be sure that we shall realise Him as near to us, in a fashion that we never did before.

That is not all. There is sustaining power. "He spreadeth abroad His wings; He taketh them; beareth them on His wings." On those broad pinions we are lifted and by them we are guarded. It matters little whether the belief that the parent bird thus carries the young, when wearied with their short flights, is correct or not. The truth which underlies the representation is

what concerns us. The beautiful metaphor is a picturesque way of saying, "In all their afflictions He was afflicted; and the Angel of His presence saved them." It is a picturesque way of saying, "Thou canst do all things through Christ which strengtheneth thee." And we may be very sure that if we let Him stir up our nests and obey His loving summons to effort, He will come very near to strengthen us for our attempts, and to bear us up when our own weak wings fail. The psalmist sang that angels' hands should bear up God's servant. That is little compared with this promise of being carried heavenwards on Jehovah's own pinions. A vile piece of Greek mythology tells how Jove once, in the guise of an eagle, bore away a boy between his great wings. It is foul where it stands, but it is blessedly true about Christian experience. If only we lay ourselves on God's wings—and that not in idleness, but having ourselves tried our poor little flight—He will see that no harm comes to us.

During life this training will go on; and after life, what then? Then, in the deepest sense, the old word will be true, "Ye know how I bore you on eagle's wings and brought you *to Myself*"; and the great promise shall be fulfilled, when the half-fledged young brood are matured and full grown, "They shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint."

THE SHELTERING WING.

"He shall cover thee with His feathers, and under His wings shalt thou trust: His truth shall be thy shield and buckler."—PSALM xci. 4.

I WAS recently speaking from the magnificent image in Moses' song, of God's protection and guidance as that of the eagle who stirred up his nest, and hovered over the young with his wings, and bore them on his pinions. That passage has led my thoughts to this one, in which the same general metaphor is employed, but with a distinct and significant difference in its application. In the former image the main idea, as I tried to show, is that of training and sustaining. Here the main idea is that of protection and fostering. *On* the wing and *under* the wing suggest entirely different notions, and both need to be taken into account in order to get the many-sided beauties and promises of these great sayings. Now, there seems to me here to be a very distinct triad of thoughts. There is the covering wing; there is the flight to its protection; and there is the warrant for that flight. "He shall cover thee with His pinions"; that is the Divine act. "Under His wings shalt thou trust"; that is the human condition. "His truth shall be thy shield and buckler"; that is the Divine manifestation which makes the human condition possible.

I. A word then, first about the covering wing.

Now, the main idea in this image is, as I have suggested, that of the expanded pinion, beneath the shelter of which the callow young lie, and are guarded. Whatsoever kites may be in the sky, whatsoever stoats and weasels may be in the hedges, they are safe there. The image suggests not only the thought of protection but those of fostering, downy warmth, peaceful proximity to a heart that throbs with parental love, and a multitude of other happy privileges realised by those who nestle beneath that wing. But while these subsidiary ideas are not to be lost sight of, the promise of protection is to be kept clear, as that chiefly intended by the psalmist.

This psalm rings throughout with the doctrine that a man who dwells "in the secret place of the Most High" has absolute immunity from all sorts of evil; and there are two regions in which that immunity, secured by being under the shadow of the Almighty, is exemplified in the psalm. The one is that of outward dangers, the other is that of temptation to sin and what we may call spiritual foes. Now, these two regions and departments in which the Christian man does realise, in the measure of his faith, the Divine protection, exhibit that protection as administered in two entirely different ways.

The triumphant assurances of this psalm, "there shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling,"—"the pestilence shall smite thousands and ten thousands beside thee, but not come nigh thee,"—seem to be entirely contradicted by experience which testifies that "there is one event to the evil and the good," and that, in epidemics or other

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widespread disasters, we all, the good and the bad, God-fearers and God-blasphemers, do fare alike, and that the conditions of exemption from physical evil are physical and not spiritual. It is of no use trying to persuade ourselves that that is not so. We shall understand God's dealings with us, and get to the very throbbing heart of such promises as these in this psalm far better, if we start from the certainty that whatever it means it does *not* mean that, with regard to external calamities and disasters, we are going to be God's petted children, or to be saved from the things that fall upon other people. No! no! we have to go a great deal deeper than that. If we have felt a difficulty, as I suppose we all have sometimes, and are ready to say with the half-despondent psalmist, "My feet were almost gone, and my steps had well-nigh slipped"; when we see what we think the complicated mysteries of the Divine providence in this world, we have to come to the belief that the evil that is in the evil will never come near a man sheltered beneath God's wing. The physical external event may be entirely the same to him as to another who is not covered with His feathers. Here are two partners in a business, the one a Christian man, and the other is not. A common disaster overwhelms them. They become bankrupts. Is insolvency the same to the one as it is to the other? Here are two men on board a ship, the one putting his trust in God, the other thinking it all nonsense to trust anything but himself. They are both drowned. Is drowning the same to the two? As their corpses lie side by side among the ooze, with the weeds over them, and the lobsters at them, you may

say of the one, but only of the one, "There shall no evil befall thee, neither any plague come nigh thy dwelling."

For the protection that is granted to faith is only to be understood by faith. It is deliverance from the evil in the evil which vindicates as no exaggeration, nor as merely an experience and a promise peculiar to the old theocracy of Israel, but not now realised—the grand sayings of this text. The poison is all wiped off the arrow by that Divine protection. It may still wound, but it does not putrefy the flesh. The sewage water comes down, but it passes into the filtering bed, and is disinfected and cleansed before it is permitted to flow over our fields.

And so, brethren, if any of you are finding that the psalm is not outwardly true, and that through the covering wing the storm of hail has come and beaten you down, do not suppose that that in the slightest degree impinges upon the reality and truthfulness of this great promise, "He shall cover thee with His feathers." Anything that has come through *them* is manifestly not an "evil." "Who is he that will harm you if ye be followers of that which is good?" "If God be for us who can be against us?" Not what the world calls, and our wrung hearts feel that it rightly calls, "sorrows" and "afflictions,"—these all work for our good; and protection consists, not in averting the blows, but in changing their character.

Then, there is another region far higher, in which this promise of my text is absolutely true—that is, in the region of spiritual defence. For no man that lies under the shadow of God, and has his heart filled with

the continual consciousness of that presence, is likely to fall before the assaults of evil that tempt him away from God; and the defence which He gives in that region is yet more magnificently impregnable than the defence which He gives against external evils. For, as the New Testament teaches us, we are kept from sin, not by any outward breastplate or armour, nor even by the Divine wing lying above us to cover us, but by the indwelling Christ in our hearts. His Spirit within us makes us free from the law of sin and death, and conquerors over all temptations.

I say not a word about all the other beautiful and pathetic associations which are connected with this emblem of the covering wing, sweet and inexhaustible as it is, but I simply leave with you the two thoughts that I have dwelt upon, of the two-fold manner of that Divine protection.

II. And now a word, in the second place, about the flight of the shelterless to the Shelter.

The word which is rendered in our Authorised Version, "shalt thou trust," is, like all Hebrew words for mental and spiritual emotions and actions, strongly metaphorical. It might have been better to retain its literal meaning here instead of substituting the abstract word "trust." That is to say, it would have been an improvement, if we had read with the Revised Version, not, "under His wings shalt thou trust," but "under His wings shalt thou take refuge." For that is the idea which is really conveyed; and in many of the psalms, if you will remember, the same metaphor is employed. "Hide me beneath the shadow of Thy wings"; "Beneath Thy wings will I take refuge until calamities are overpast";

and the like. Many such passages will, no doubt, occur to your memories.

But what I wish to signalise is just this, that in this emblem of flying into a refuge from impending perils we get a far more vivid conception, and a far more useful one, as it seems to me, of what Christian faith really is than we derive from many learned volumes and much theological hair-splitting. "Under His wings shalt thou flee for refuge," is not that a vivid, intense, picturesque, but most illuminative way of telling us what is the very essence, and what is the urgency, and what is the worth, of what we call faith? The Old Testament is full of the teaching—which is masked to ordinary readers, but is the same teaching as the New Testament is confessedly full of—of the necessity of faith as the one bond that binds men to God. If only our translators had wisely determined upon a uniform rendering in Old and New Testament of words that are synonymous, the reader would have seen what is often now reserved for the student, that all these sayings in the Old Testament about "trusting in God" run on all fours with "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved."

But just mark what comes out of that metaphor; that "trust," the faith which unites with God, and brings a man beneath the shadow of His wings, is nothing more nor less than the flying into the refuge that is provided for us. Does that not speak to us of the urgency of the case? Does that not speak to us eloquently of the perils which environ us? Does it not speak to us of the necessity of flight, swift, with all the powers of our will? Is the faith which is a flying into a refuge

fairly described as an intellectual act of believing in a testimony? Surely it is something a great deal more than that. A man out in the plain, with the avenger of blood, hot-breathed and bloody-minded, behind him might believe, as much as he liked, that there would be safety within the walls of the City of Refuge, but unless he took to his heels without loss of time, the spear would be in his back before he knew where he was. There are plenty of men that know all about the security of the Refuge, and believe it utterly, but never run for it; and so never get into it. Faith is the gathering up of the whole powers of the nature to fling myself into the asylum, to cast myself into God's arms, to take shelter beneath the shadow of His wings. And unless a man does that, and swiftly, he is exposed to every bird of prey in the sky, and to every beast of prey lurking in wait for him.

The metaphor tells us, too, what are the limits and the worth of faith. A man is not saved because he believes that he is saved, but because by believing he lays hold of the salvation. It is not the flight that is impregnable, and makes those behind its strong bulwarks secure. Not my outstretched hand, but a Hand that my hand grasps, is what holds me up. The power of faith is but that it brings me into contact with God, and sets me behind the seven-fold bastions of the Almighty protection.

So, brethren, another consideration comes out of this clause: "Under His wings shalt thou trust." If you do not flee for refuge to that wing, it is of no use to you, however expanded it is, however soft and downy its underside, however sure its protection. You remember

the passage where our Lord uses the same venerable figure with modifications, and says: "How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, *and ye would not*." So our "would not" thwarts Christ's "would." Flight to the refuge is the condition of being saved. How can a man get shelter by any other way than by running to the shelter? The wing is expanded: it is for us to say whether we will "flee for refuge to the hope set before us."

III. Now, lastly, the warrant for this flight.

"His truth shall be thy shield." Now, "truth" here does not mean the body of revealed words, which are often called God's truth, but it describes a certain characteristic of the Divine nature. And if, instead of "truth," we read the good old English word "troth" we should be a great deal nearer understanding what the psalmist meant. Or if "troth" is archaic, and conveys little meaning to us; suppose we substitute a somewhat longer word, of the same meaning, and say, "His faithfulness shall be thy shield." You cannot trust a God that has not given you an inkling of his character or disposition, but if he has spoken, then you "know where to have him." That is just what the psalmist means. How can a man be encouraged to fly into a refuge, unless he is absolutely sure that there is an entrance for him into it, and that, entering, he is safe? And that security is provided in the great thought of God's troth. "Thy faithfulness is like the great mountains." "Who is like unto Thee, O Lord; or to Thy faithfulness round about Thee?" That faithfulness shall be our "shield," not a tiny targe that a

man could bear upon his left arm, but the word means the large shield, planted in the ground in front of the soldier, covering him, however hot the fight; and circling him around, like a tower of iron.

God is "faithful" to all the obligations under which He has come by making us. That is what one of the New Testament writers tells us, when he speaks about Him as "a faithful Creator." Then, if He has put desires into our hearts, be sure that somewhere there is their satisfaction; and if He has given us needs, be sure that in Him there is the supply; and if He has lodged in us aspirations which make us restless, be sure that if we will turn them to Him, they will be satisfied and we shall be at rest. "God never sends mouths but He sends meat to fill them." "He remembers our frame," and measures His dealings accordingly. When He made me, He bound Himself to make it possible that I should be blessed for ever; and He has done it.

God is faithful to His word, according to that great saying in the epistle to the Hebrews, where the writer tells us that by "God's counsel," and "God's oath," "two immutable things," we might have "strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us."

God is faithful to His own past. The more He has done the more He will do. "Thou hast been my help; leave me not, neither forsake me." Therein we present a plea which God Himself will honour. And He is faithful to His own past in a yet wider sense. For all the revelations of His love and of His grace in times that are gone, though they might be miraculous in

their form, are permanent in their essence. So one of the psalmists, hundreds of years after the time that Israel was led through the wilderness, sang: "There did *we*"—of this present generation—"rejoice in Him." What has been, is, and will be, for Thou art "the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever."

We have no God that lurks in darkness, but one that has come into the light. We have to run, not into a refuge that is built upon a "perhaps," but upon "Verily, verily! I say unto thee." Let us build rock upon rock, and let our faith correspond to the faithfulness of Him that has promised.

THE TRADING SERVANTS.

"Then came the first, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained ten pounds. . . . And the second came, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained five pounds."—LUKE xix. 16, 18.

THE evangelist, contrary to his usual practice, tells us what was the occasion of this parable. It was spoken at Jericho, on our Lord's last journey to Jerusalem, Bethany was but a day's march distant; Calvary but a week ahead. An unusual tension of spirit marked our Lord's demeanour, and was noticed by the disciples with awe. It infected them, and the excitable crowd, which was more than usually excitable because on its way to the Passover festival. The air was electric, and everybody felt that something was impending. They "thought that the kingdom of God should *immediately* appear." So Christ spoke this parable to damp down that expectation which might easily flash up into the flame of rebellion. He tells them His true programme. He had to go a long way off to receive the kingdom. That was a familiar experience amongst the nations tributary to Rome, and more than one of the Herodian family had passed through it. In the meantime there was to be a period of expectancy. It was to be a long time, for He had to go to a "far country," and it was to be extended enough for the servants to turn their money over many times during

His absence. When He *did* return it was not to do what they expected. They thought that the kingdom meant Jewish lordship over subject nations. He teaches them that it meant the destruction of the rebellious citizens, and a rigid scrutiny of the servants' faithfulness.

Now, the words of my two texts bring out in connection with this outline of the future some large lessons which I desire to draw.

I. Notice the small capital that the servants receive to trade with.

It was a pound apiece, which, numismatic authorities tell us, is somewhat about the same value as some £6 odd of English money ; though, of course, the purchasing power would be considerably greater. A small amount, and an equal amount to every servant—these are the two salient points of this parable. They make the broad distinction between it and the other parable, which is often mixed up with it, the parable of the talents. There, instead of the amount being excessively small, it is exceedingly great ; for a talent was worth some £400, and ten talents would be £4,000, a fair capital for a man to start with. The other point of difference between the two parables, which belongs to the essence of each, is that while the gift in the one case is identical, in the other case it is graduated and different.

Now, to suppose that these are but two varying versions of the same parable, which the Evangelists have manipulated is, in my judgment, to be blind to the plainest of the lessons to be drawn from them.

There are two sorts of gifts. In one, all Christian men, the Master's servants, are alike ; in another, they differ. Now, what is the thing in which all Christians

are alike? What gift do they all possess equally; rich and poor, largely endowed or slenderly equipped; "talented"—as we use the word from the parable—or not? The rich man and the poor, the wise man and the foolish, the cultured man and the ignorant, the Fijian and the Englishman, have one thing alike—the message of salvation which we call the Gospel of the blessed Lord. That is the "pound." We all stand upon an equal platform there, however differently we are endowed in respect of capacities and other matters. All have it; and all have the same.

Now if that is the interpretation of this parable, there are considerations that flow from that thought, and on which I would dwell for a moment.

The first of them is the apparent smallness of the gift. You may feel a difficulty in accepting that explanation, and may have been saying to yourselves that it cannot be correct, because Jesus Christ would never compare the unspeakable gift of His message of salvation through Him, to that paltry sum. But throw yourselves back to the moment of utterance, and I think you will feel the pathos and power of the metaphor. Here was that handful of disciples set in the midst of a hostile world, dead against them, with its banded superstitions, venerable idolatries, systematised philosophies, the force of the mightiest instruments of material power that the world had ever seen, in the organisation and military power of Rome. And there stood twelve Galilean men, with their simple, unlettered message; one poor "pound," and that was all. "The foolishness of preaching" the message which to "the Jews was a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks was folly," was all that they were equipped with.

Their Master, who left them to seek a Kingdom, had so little to bestow, before He received His crown, that all that He could spare them was that small sum. They had to go into business in a very poor way. They had to be content to do a very insignificant retail trade. "The foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men." The old experience of the leather sling and the five stones out of the brook, in the hand of the stripling, that made short work of the brazen armour of the giant, and went with a whizz into his thick skull, and laid him prostrate, was to be repeated. "He called his servants, and gave them"—a pound apiece! If you and I, Christian men and women, were true to the Master's legacy, and believed that we have in it more wealth than the treasures of wisdom and knowledge or force which the world has laid up, we should find that our mite was more than they all have in their possession.

Further, the texts suggest the purpose for which the pound is given. The servants had to live on it themselves, no doubt. So have we. They had to trade with it. So have we. Now that means two things. We get the Gospel, not as some of us lazily suppose, in order to secure that we shall not be punished for our past sins whilst we live, and go up to heaven when we die. We get it, not only to enjoy its consolations and its sweetness, but to do business with.

And there are two ways in which this trading is to be done by us. The main one is the honest application of the principles and powers of the Gospel to the moulding of our own characters, and the making us better, purer, gentler, more heavenly-minded, and more Christlike.

That is the first trading that we have to carry on with the Word. We get it not for an indolent assent, as so many of us misuse it. We receive it not merely to say, "Oh! I believe it," and there an end, but that we may bring it to bear upon all our conduct, and that it may be the chief formative influence in our characters. Christian people! is that what you do with your Christianity? Is the Gospel moulding you, hour by hour, moment by moment? Have you brought all its great truths to bear upon your daily lives? Have you inwrought its substance into, not merely your understandings or your emotions, but your daily conduct? Is it indeed the life of your lives, and the leaven that is leavening your whole character? You have it to trade with; see that you do not wrap it in a napkin, and stow it idly away in some corner.

Then there is the other way of trading and that is, telling it to others. That is an obligation incumbent on all Christians. There may be differences in regard to other gifts, which determine the *manner* in which each shall use the equal gift which we all possess alike. But these are of subordinate importance. The main thing is to feel that the possession of Christian faith, which is our way of receiving the pound, carries with it indissolubly the obligation of Christian evangelism. And however it may be discharged, discharged it is to be, by every true servant. I am sometimes half disposed to think that it would have been better for the Church if there had never been any men in my position, on whom the mass of unspiritual, idle because busy, and silent because little-loving, Christian professors contentedly roll the whole obligation to preach God's Gospel. My

brethren, the world is not going to be evangelised by officials. Until all Christian people wake up to the sense that they have the "pound" to trade with, there will be nothing adequate done to bring the world to the obedience and the love of Jesus Christ. You say you have the Gospel; if you have it, what are you doing with it?

Self-centred Christianity, if such a thing were possible, is a mistake. It is generally a sham; it is always a crime. A man that puts away his pound, and never goes out and says, "Come, share with me in the wealth that I have found in Jesus Christ," will be like a miser that puts his hoardings into an old stocking, and hides it in the ground somewhere. When he goes to dig it up, he is only too likely to find that all the coins have slipped out. If you want to keep your Christianity, let the air into it. If you want it to increase, sow it. There are hosts of you who would be far happier Christian people, if you came out of your shells and traded with your pound.

II. Observe the varying profits of the trading.

The one man says, "Thy pound hath gained ten pounds." The other says, "Thy pound hath gained five pounds." And the seven who are not mentioned, no doubt had also varying results to present. Now that inequality of profits from an equal capital to start with, is but a picturesque way of saying what is, alas! too obviously true, that Christian people do not all stand on the same level in regard to the use they have made of, and the benefits they have derived from, the one equal gift which was bestowed upon them. It is the same to every one at the beginning, but differences develop as they go on. One man makes twice as much out of it as another does.

Now, let us distinctly understand what sort of differences these are which our Lord signalises here. Let me clear away a mistake which may interfere with the true lessons of this parable, that the differences in question are the superficial ones in apparent results which follow from difference of endowments, or from difference of influential position. That is the kind of meaning that is often attached to the "ten pounds" or the "five pounds" in the text. We think that the ten pounder is the man who has been able to do some large spiritual work for Jesus Christ, that fills the world with its greatness, the man who has been set in some most conspicuous place, and by reason of intellectual ability or other talent has been able to gather in many souls into the kingdom; but that is not Christ's way of estimating. We should be going dead in the teeth of everything that He teaches if we thought that such as these were the differences intended. No, no! Every man that co-operates in a great work with equal diligence and devotion has an equal place in his eyes. The soldier that clapped Luther on the back as he was going into the Diet of Worms, and said, "You have a bigger fight to fight than we ever had; cheer up! little monk," stands on the same level as the great reformer, if what he did was done from the same motive and with as full consecration of himself. The old law of Israel states the true principle of Christian recompense: they that "abide by the stuff" have the same share in the spoil as they "that go down into the battle." All servants that have exercised equal faithfulness and equal diligence, stand on the same level, and have the same success; no matter how different may be their estimation in the eyes

of men; no matter how different may be the conspicuousness of the places that they fill in the eyes of the world whilst they live, or on the records of the Church when they are dead. Equal diligence will issue in equal results in the development of character. And the only reason for the diversity of results is the diversity of faithfulness and of zeal in trading with the pound.

Notice, too, before I go further, how all who trade make profits. There are no bad debts in that business. There are no investments that result in a loss. Everybody that goes into it makes something by it; which is just to say that any man that is honest and earnest in the attempt to utilise the powers of Christ's Gospel for his own culture, or for the world's good, will succeed in reality, however he may seem to fail in appearance. There are no commercial failures in this trading. The man with his ten pounds of profit made them because he worked hardest. The man that made the five made all that his work entitled him to. There was nobody who came and said, "Lord! I put thy pound into my little shop, and I did my best with it, and it is all gone!" Every Christian effort is crowned with success.

III. Lastly, we have here the final declaration of profits.

The master has come back. He is a king now, but he is the master still, and he wants to know what has become of the money that was left in the servants' hands. Now, that is but a metaphorical way of bringing to our minds that which we cannot conceive of without metaphor—viz., the retribution that lies beyond the grave for us all. Although we cannot conceive it without metaphor, we may reach, through the metaphor

to some apprehension, at any rate, of the facts that lie behind it. There are two points in reference to this final declaration of profits suggested here.

The first is this, that all the profit is ascribed to the capital. Neither of the two men say: "I, with thy pound, have gained," but, "Thy pound hath gained." That is accurately true. For if I accept, and live by, any great moral truth or principle, it is the principle or the truth that is the real productive cause of the change in my life and character. I, by my acceptance of it, simply put the belt on the drum that connects my loom with the engine, but it is the engine that drives the looms and the shuttle, and brings out the web at last. And so, Christian people who, with God's grace in their hearts, have utilised the "pound," and thereby made themselves Christlike, have to say, "It was not I, but Christ in me. It was the Gospel, and not my faith in the Gospel, that wrought this change." Is it your teeth or your dinner that nourish you? Is it the Gospel or your trust in the Gospel that is the true cause of your sanctifying?

With regard to the other aspect of this trading, the same thing is true. Is it my word, or Christ's Word ministered by me that helps any of my hearers who are helped? Surely! surely! there is no question about that. It is the "pound" that gains the "pounds." "Paul planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So, then, neither is he that planteth anything nor he that watereth, but God that giveth the increase."

The other consideration suggested by these words is the exact knowledge of the precise results of a life, which is possessed at last. Each servant knew precisely what

was the nett outcome of his whole activity. That is exactly what we do not know here, and never shall, and never can know. But yonder all illusions will have vanished; and there will be two sorts of disillusionising then. Men, for instance, of my profession, whose names are familiar, and who hold high places in the esteem of the Church, and may be tempted to suppose that they have done a great deal—I am afraid that many of us will find, when we get yonder, that we have not done nearly so much as our admirers in this world, and we ourselves, were sometimes tempted to think that we had done. The searching light that comes in will show a great many seamy places in the cloth that looks very sound when it is inspected in the twilight. And there will be another kind of disillusionising. Many a man has said, "Lord! I have laboured in vain, and spent my strength for nought," who will find out that he was mistaken, and that where he saw failure there were solid results; that where he thought the grain had perished in the furrows, it had sprung up and borne fruit unto life everlasting. "Lord! when saw we Thee in prison, and visited Thee?" We never knew that we had done anything of the sort. "Behold! I was left alone," said the widowed Jerusalem when she was restored to her husband, "these"—children that have gathered round me—"where had they been?" We shall know, for good or bad, exactly the results of our lives.

We shall have to tell them. The slothful servant, too, was under this compulsion of absolute honesty. If he had not been so, do you think he would have ventured to stand up before his master, a king now, and insult him to his face? But he had to turn himself inside out, and

tell then what he had thought in his inmost heart. So "every one of us shall give an account of himself to God;" and, like a man in the Bankruptcy Court, we shall have to explain our books, and go into all our transactions. We are working in the dark to-day. Our work will be seen as it is, in the light. The coral reef rises in the ocean and the creatures that made it do not see it. The ocean will be drained away, and the reef will stand up sheer and distinct.

My brother! "I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire"—and when you have bought your pound, see that you use it; for "it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful."

THE REWARDS OF THE TRADING SERVANTS.

"Because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities . . . Be thou also over five cities."—LUKE xix. 17, 19.

THE relation between this parable of the pounds and the other of the talents has often been misunderstood, and is very noteworthy. They are not two editions of one parable variously manipulated by the Evangelists, but they are two parables presenting two kindred and yet diverse aspects of one truth. They are neither identical, as some have supposed, nor contradictory, as others have imagined; but they are complementary. The parable of the talents represents the servants as receiving different endowments; one gets five; another two; another one. They make the same rate of profit with their different endowments. The man that turned his two talents into four did just as well as he that turned his five into ten. In either case the capital is doubled. Since the diligence is the same, the rewards are the same, and to each is given the identical same eulogium and the same entrance into the joy of his Lord. So the lesson of that parable is that, however unequal are our endowments, there may be as much diligence shown in the use of the smallest as in the greatest, and where that is the case, the man with the

small endowments will stand on the same level of recompense as the man with the large.

But that is not all. This parable comes in to complete the thoughts. Here all the servants get the same gift, the one pound, but they make different profits out of it, one securing twice as much as the other. And, inasmuch as the diligence has been different, the rewards are different. So the lesson of this parable is that unequal faithfulness in the use of the same opportunities results in unequal retribution and reward. Unequal faithfulness, I say, because, of course, in both parables it is presupposed that the factor in producing the profit is not any accidental circumstance, but the earnestness and faithfulness of the servant. Christ does not pay for results; He pays for motives. And it is not because the man has made a certain number of pounds, but because in making them he has shown a certain amount of faithfulness, that he is rewarded. Christ does not say, "Well done! good and *successful* servant," but "Well done! good and *faithful* servant."

So, keeping these two sides of the one truth in view, I desire now to draw out two or three of the lessons which seem to me to lie in the principle laid down in my texts, of the unequal results of the unequal diligence of these servants.

I. I would note the solemn view of this present life that underlies the whole.

"Thou hast been faithful in a very little; have thou authority over five cities." Well, that rests upon the thought that all our present life here is a stewardship, which in its nature is preparatory to larger work yonder. And that is the point of view from which alone it is

right to look at, and possible to understand, this else unintelligible and bewildering life on earth. Clearly enough, to anybody that has eyes in their heads, moral ends are supreme in man's relation to nature, and in man's life. We are here for the sake of making character, and of acquiring aptitudes and capacities which shall be exercised hereafter. The whole of our earthly career is the exercise of stewardship in regard to all the gifts with which we have been entrusted, in order that by the right exercise of that stewardship we may develop ourselves and acquire powers.

Now if it is clear that the whole meaning and end of the present life is to make character, and that we have to do with the material and the transient only, in order that, like the creatures that build up the coral reefs, we may draw from the ever-varying waves of the ocean that welters around us solid substance which we can pile up into an enduring monument—is this process of making character, and developing ourselves, to be cut short by such a contemptible thing as the death of the body? One very distinguished evolutionist, who has been forced onwards from his position to a kind of theism, declares that he is driven to a belief in immortality because he must believe in the reasonableness of God's work. And it seems to me that if indeed—as is plainly the case—moral ends are supreme in our life's history, it brings utter intellectual bewilderment and confusion to suppose that these ends are kept in view up till the moment of death, and that then down comes the guillotine and cuts off all. God does not take the rough ore out of the mine, and deal with it, and change it to polished steel, and shape His weapons, and

then take them when they are at their highest temper and their sharpest edge, and break them across His knee. No! if here we are shaped, it is because yonder there is work for the tool.

So all here is apprenticeship, and the issues of to-day are recorded in eternity. We are like men perched up in a signal-box by the side of the line; we pull over a lever here, and it lifts an arm half a mile off. The smallest wheel upon one end of a shaft may cause another ten times its diameter to revolve, at the other end of the shaft through the wall there. Here we prepare, yonder we achieve.

II. Note the consequent littleness and greatness of this present.

"Thou hast been faithful in a very little." Some of you may remember a recent sermon on the previous part of this parable, in which I tried to bring out an explanation of the small sum with which these servants were entrusted—the pound apiece for their little retail businesses—and found reason to believe that the interpretation of that gift was the Gospel of Jesus Christ which, in comparison with the world's wisdom and philosophies and material forces, seemed such a very insignificant thing. If we keep that interpretation in view in treating my present text, then there is hinted to us the contrast between the necessary limitations and incompletenesses even of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ which we have here, and the flood of glory and of light, which shall pour upon our eyes when the veil of flesh and sense has dropped away. Here we know in part; here, even with the intervention of the Eternal and Incarnate Word of God, the Revealer of the Father, we

see as in a glass darkly; there face to face. The magnificences and the harmonies of that great Revelation of God in Jesus Christ, which transcends all human thought and all worldly wisdom, are but a point, in comparison with the continent of illumination which shall come to us hereafter. "The moon that rules the night" is the revelation that we have to-day, the reflection and echo of the sun that will rule the unsetting day of the heavens.

But I pass from that aspect of the words before us to the other, which, I suppose, is rather to be kept in view, in which the faithfulness in a very little points to the smallness of this present, as measured against that infinite future to which it conducts. Much has been said upon that subject, which is very antagonistic to the real ideas of Christianity. Life here, and this present, have been depreciated unduly, untruly, and unthankfully. And harm has been done, not only to the men who accept that estimate, but to the world that scoffs at it. There is nothing in the Bible, which is at all in sympathy with the so-called religious depreciation of the present, but there *is* this—"the things that are seen are temporal; the things that are unseen are eternal." The lower hills look high when beheld from the flat plain that stretches on this side of them; but, if the mist lifts, the great white peaks come out beyond them, glittering in the sunshine, and with the untrodden snows on their inaccessible pinnacles; and nobody thinks about the green foothills, with the flowers upon them, any more. Brethren, think away the mist, for you can, and open your eyes, and see the snow-clad hills of eternity, and then you will understand how low is the elevation of the heights in the foreground. The greatness of the

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future makes the present little, but the little present is great, because its littleness is the parent of the great future. "The child is father of the man"; and earth's narrow range widens out into the infinitude of eternity and of heaven. The only thing that gives real greatness and sublimity to our mortal life is its being the vestibule to another. Historically you will find that, wherever faith in a future life has become dim, as it has become dim in large sections of the educated classes to-day, there the general tone of strenuous endeavour has dropped, and the fatal feeling of "It is not worth while" begins to creep over society. "Is life worth living?" is the question that is asked on all sides of us to-day. And the modern recrudescence of pessimism has along with it, as one of the main thoughts which cut the nerves of effort, doubt of, and disbelief in, a future. It is because the very little opens out into the immeasurably great, and the passing moments tick us onwards into an unpassing eternity, that the moments are worth living through, and the fleeting insignificances of earth's existence become solemn and majestic as the portals of heaven.

III. Notice the future form of activity prepared for by faithful trading.

"Thou hast been faithful in a very little; have thou authority over ten cities." Now I do not need to spend a word in dwelling on the contrast between the two pictures of the huckster with his little shop and the pound of capital to begin with, and the vizier that has control of ten of the cities of his master. That is too plain to need any enforcement. We are all here, all us Christian people especially, like men that keep a small shop, in a back street, with a few trivial things in the

window, but we are heirs of a kingdom. That is what Christ wants us to lay to heart, so that the little shop shall not seem so very small, and its smoky obscurity shall be irradiated by true visions of what it will lead to.

Nor do I wish to risk any kind of fanciful and precarious speculations as to the manner and the sphere of the authority that is here set forth; only I would keep to one or two plain things. Faithfulness here prepares for participation in Christ's authority hereafter. For we are not to forget that whilst the master, the nobleman, was away seeking the kingdom, all that he could give his servants was the little stock-in-trade with which he started them, and that it is because he has won his kingdom that he is able to dispense to them the larger gifts of dominion over the ten and the five cities. The authority is delegated, but it is more than that—it is shared. For it is participation in, and not merely delegation from, the King and His rule, that is set forth in this and in other places of Scripture, for "they shall sit down with Me on My throne, even as I also overcame and am set down with My Father on His throne.

If, then, the rule set forth, in whatever sphere and in whatever fashion it may be exercised, is participation in Christ's authority, let us not forget that therefore it is a rule of which the manifestation is service. In heaven as on earth, and for the Lord in heaven as for the Lord on earth, and for the servants in heaven as for the servants on earth, the law stands irrefragable and eternal—"If any man will be chief among you, let him be your minister." The authority over the ten cities is the capacity and opportunity of serving and helping every citizen in them all. What that help may be let us leave.

It is better to be ignorant than to speculate about matters where there is no possibility of certainty. Ignorance is more impressive than knowledge, only be sure that no dignity can live amidst the pure light of the heavens, except after the fashion of the dignity of the Lord of all, who there, as here, is the servant of all.

But there is a thought in connection with this great though dim revelation of the future, which may well be laid to heart by us. And that is, that however close and direct the dependence on, and the communion with, Jesus Christ, the King of all His servants, in that future state is, it shall not be so close and direct as to exclude room for the exercise of brotherly sympathy and brotherly aid. We shall have Christ for our life and our light and our glory. But there, as here, we shall help one another to have Him more fully, and to understand Him more perfectly. What further lies in these great words, I do not venture to guess. Enough to know that Christ will be all in all, and that Christ in each will help the others to know Christ more fully.

Only remember, we have to take this great conception of the future as being one that implies largely increased and ennobled activity. A great deal of very cheap ridicule has been cast upon the Christian conception of the future life as if it was an eternity of idleness and of repose. Of repose, yes; of idleness, no! For it is no sinecure to be the governor of ten cities. There will be a good deal of work to be done, in order to discharge that office properly. Only it will be work that does not disturb repose, and at one and the same moment His servants will serve in constant activity, and gaze upon His face in calm contemplation. Christ's session at the right

hand of God does not interfere with Christ's continual activity here. And, in like manner, His servants shall rest from their labours, but not from their work; they shall serve Him undisturbed, and shall repose, but not idly.

IV. Lastly, our texts remind us of the variety in recompense which corresponds to diversity in faithfulness.

I need but say a word about that. Your time will not admit of more. The one man gets his ten cities because his faithfulness has brought in ten pounds. The other gets five, corresponding to his faithfulness. As I said, our Lord pays, not for results, except in so far as these are conditioned and secured by the diligence of His servants. And so we come to the old familiar, and yet too often forgotten, conception of degrees in dignity, degrees in nearness to Him. That thought runs all through the New Testament representations of a future life, sometimes more clearly, sometimes more obscurely, but generally present. It is in entire accordance with the whole conceptions of that future, because the Christian notion of it is not that it is an arbitrary reward, but that it is the natural outcome of the present; and, of course, therefore, varying according to the present, of which it is the outcome. We get what we have wrought for. We get what we are capable of receiving, and what we are capable of receiving depends upon what has been our faithfulness here.

Now, that is perfectly consistent with the other side of the truth which the twin parable sets forth—viz., that the recompenses of the future are essentially one. All the servants, who were entrusted with the talents, received the same eulogium, and entered into the same joy of

their Lord. That is one side of the truth. And the other is, that the degree in which Christian people, when they depart hence, possess the one gift of eternal life and Christ-shared joy is conditioned by their faithfulness and diligence here. Do not let the Gospel that says "the gift of God is eternal life" make you forget the completing truths, that the measure in which a man possesses that eternal life depends on his fitness for it, and that fitness depends on his faithfulness of service and of union with his Lord.

We obscure this great truth often by reason of the way in which we preach the deeper truth on which it rests—forgiveness and acceptance all unmerited, through faith in Jesus Christ. But the two things are not contradictory; they are complementary. No man will be faithful as a steward who is not full of faith as a penitent sinner. No man will enter into the joy of his Lord, who does not enter in through the gate of penitence and trust. But, having entered, we are ranked according to the faithfulness of our service and diligence of stewardship. "Wherefore, giving all diligence, make your calling and election sure, for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you *abundantly* into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

THE ARTICLES OF THE NEW COVENANT.

I. GOD'S WRITING ON THE HEART.

. . . "I will put My laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts."—HEB. viii. 10.

WE can scarcely estimate the shock to a primitive Hebrew Christian when he discovered that Judaism was to fade away. Such an earthquake might seem to leave nothing standing. Now, the great object of this epistle is to insist on that truth, and to calm the early Hebrew Christians under it, by showing them that the disappearance of the older system left them no poorer but infinitely richer, inasmuch as all that was in it was more perfectly in Christ's Gospel. The writer has accordingly been giving his strength to showing that, all along the line, Christianity is the perfecting of Judaism, in its Founder, in its priesthood, in its ceremonies, in its Sabbath. Here he touches the great central thought of the covenant between God and man, and he falls back upon the strange words of one of the old prophets. Jeremiah had declared as emphatically as he, the writer, has been declaring, that the ancient system was to melt away and be absorbed in a new covenant between God and man. Is there any other instance of a religion which, on the one side proclaims its own eternal duration—"the Word of the Lord endureth for ever"—and on the other side declares that it is to be abrogated, antiquated, and

done away? The writer of the epistle had learnt from sacreder lips than Jeremiah's the same lesson, for the Master said at the most solemn hour of His career, "This is the blood of the New Covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins."

These articles of the New Covenant go very deep into the essence of Christianity, and may well be thoughtfully pondered by us all, if we wish to know what the specific differences between the ultimate revelation in Jesus Christ, and all other systems are. The words I have read for my text are the first of these articles.

I. Let us first try to ascertain what exactly is the meaning of this great promise.

Now it seems to me that the two clauses which I have read for my text are not precisely parallel, but parallel with a difference. I take it, that "mind" here means very much what we make it mean in our popular phraseology, a kind of synonym for the understanding, or the intellectual part of a man's nature; and that "heart," on the other hand, means something a little wider than it does in our popular phraseology, and indicates not only the affections, but the centre of personality in the human will, as well as the seat of love. So these two clauses will mean, you see, if we carry that distinction with us, two things—the clear perception of the will of God, and the coincidence of that will with our inclinations and desires. In men's natural consciences, there is the law written on their minds, but alas! we all know that there is an awful chasm between perception and inclination, and that it is one thing to know our duty, and quite another to wish to do it. So the heart of this great promise of my text is that these two things shall coin-

cide in a Christian man, shall cover precisely the same ground as two of Euclid's triangles having the same angles will, if laid upon each other, coincide line for line and angle for angle. Thus, says this great promise, it is possible—and, if we observe the conditions, it shall be actual in us—that knowledge and will shall cover absolutely and exactly the same ground. Inclination shall be duty, and duty shall be inclination and delight. Nothing short of such a thought lies here.

And how is that wonderful change upon men to be accomplished? "*I* will put, *I* will write." Only He can do it. We all know, by our own experience, the schism that gapes between the two things. *Every* man in the world knows a vast deal more of duty than *any* man in the world does. The worst of us has a standard that rebukes his evil, and the best of us has a standard that transcends his goodness, and, alas! often transcends his inclination. But the Gospel of our Lord and Saviour comes armed with sufficient power to make this miracle an actuality for us all.

For it comes, does it not? to substitute for all other motives to obedience, the one motive of love. They but half understand the Gospel who dwell upon its sanctions of reward and punishment, and would seek to frighten men into goodness by brandishing the whip of law before them, and uncovering the lid that shuts in the smoke of a hell. And they misinterpret it almost as much, if there be any such, who find the chief motive for Christian obedience in the glories of the heavenly state. These are subordinate and legitimate in their secondary place, but the Gospel appeals to men, not merely nor chiefly on the ground of self-interest, but it comes to

them with the one appeal, "If ye love Me, keep My commandments." That is how the law is written on the heart. Wherever there is love, there is a supreme delight in divining and in satisfying the wish and will of the beloved. His lightest word is law to the loving heart; his looks are spells and commandments. And if it is so in regard of our poor, imperfect, human loves, how infinitely more so is it where the heart is touched by true affection for His own infinite love's sake, of that "Jesus" who is "most desired!" The secret of Christian morality is that duty is changed into choice, because love is made the motive for obedience.

And, still further, let me remind you how this great promise is fulfilled in the Christian life, because to have Christ shrined in the heart is the heart of Christianity, and Christ Himself is our law. So, in another sense than that which I have been already touching, the law is written on the heart on which, by faith and self-surrender, the name of Christ is written. And when it becomes our whole duty to become like Him, then He being throned in our hearts, our law is within, and Himself to His "darlings" shall be, as the poet has it about another matter, "both law and impulse." Write His name upon your hearts, and your law of life is thereby written there.

And, still further, let me remind you that this great promise is fulfilled, because the very specific gift of Christianity to men is the gift of a new nature, which is "created in righteousness and holiness that flows from truth." The communication of a Divine life kindred with, and percipient of, and submissive to, the Divine will is the gift that Christianity—or, rather, let us put

away the abstraction and say that Christ—offers to us all, and gives to every man who will accept it. And thus, and in other ways on which I cannot dwell now, this great article of the New Covenant lies at the very foundation of the Christian life, and gives its peculiar tinge and cast to all Christian morality, commandment, and obligation.

But let me remind you how this great truth has to be held with caution. The evidence of this letter itself shows that, whilst the writer regarded it as a distinctive characteristic of the Gospel, that by it men's wills were stamped with a delight in the law of God, and a transcript thereof, he still regarded these wills as unstable, as capable of losing the sharp lettering, of having the writing of God obliterated, and still regarded it as possible that there should be apostasy and departure.

So there is nothing in this promise which suspends the need for effort and for conflict. Still "the flesh lusteth against the spirit." Still there are parts of the nature on which that law is not written. It is the final triumph, that the whole man, body, soul, and spirit is, through and through, penetrated with, and joyfully obedient to the commandments of the Lord. There is need, too, not only for continuous progress, effort, conflict, in order to keep our hearts open for His handwriting, but also for much caution, lest at any time we should mistake our own self-will for the utterance of the Divine voice. "Love, and do what thou wilt," said a great Christian teacher. It is an unguarded statement, but profoundly true as in some respects it is, it is only absolutely true if we have made sure that the "thou" that wills" is the heart on which God has written His law.

Only God can do this for us. The Israelites of old were bidden "these things which I command thee this day shall be on thy heart," and they were to write them on their hand, and on the frontlet between their eyes, and on their doorposts. The latter commands were obeyed, having been hardened into a form; and phylacteries on the arm, and scrolls on the lintel, were the miserable obedience which was given to them. But the complete writing on the heart was beyond the power of unaided man. A psalmist said, "I delight to do Thy will, and Thy law is within my heart." But a verse or two after, in the same psalm, he wailed, "Mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up. They are more than the hairs of my head. Therefore my heart faileth me." One Man has transcribed the Divine will on His will, without blurring a letter, or omitting a clause. One Man has been able to say, in the presence of the most fearful temptations, "Not My will, but Thine, be done." One Man has so completely written, perceived, and obeyed, the law of His Father, that, looking back on all His life, He was conscious of no defect or divergence, either in motive or in act, and could affirm on the cross, "It is finished." He who thus perfectly kept that Divine law will give to us, if we ask Him, His spirit, to write it upon our hearts, and "the law of the spirit of life which was in Christ Jesus shall make us free from the law of sin and death."

II. Now, secondly, note the impassable gulf which this fulfilled promise makes between Christianity and all other systems.

It is a *new* covenant, undoubtedly—an altogether new thing in the world. For whatever other laws

have been promulgated among men have had this in common, that they have stood over against the Will with a whip in one hand, and a box of sweets in the other, and have tried to influence desires and inclinations, first by the setting forth of duty, then by threatening, and then by promises to obedience. *There* is the inherent weakness of all which is merely law. You do not make men good by telling them what goodness consists in, nor yet by setting forth the bitter consequences that may result from wrong-doing. All that is surface work. But here is a system which says that it deals with the will as from within, and moves, and moulds, and revolutionises it. "You cannot make men sober by act of parliament," people say. Well! I do not believe the conclusion which is generally drawn from that statement, but it is perfectly true in itself. To tell a man what he ought to do is very, very little help towards his doing it. I do not under-estimate the value of a clear perception of duty, but I say that, apart from Christianity, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, that clear perception of duty is like a clear opening of a great gulf between a man and safety, which only makes him recoil in despair with the thought, "how can I ever leap across *that*?" But the peculiarity of the Gospel is that it gives both the knowledge of what we ought to be; and with and in the knowledge, the desire; and with and in the knowledge and the desire, the power to be what God would have us to be.

All other systems, whether the laws of a nation, or the principles of a scientific morality, or the solemn voice that speaks in our minds proclaiming some version

of God's law to every man—all these are comparatively impotent. They are like bill-stickers going about a rebellious province posting the king's proclamation. Unless they have soldiers at their back, the proclamation is not worth the paper it is printed upon. But Christianity comes, and gives us that which it requires from us.

So, in his epigrammatic way, St. Augustine penetrated to the very heart of this article when he prayed, "Give what Thou commandest, and command what Thou wilt."

III. Note the freedom and blessedness of this fulfilled promise.

Not to do wrong may be the mark of a slave's timid obedience. Not to wish to do wrong is the charter of a son's free and blessed service. There is a higher possibility yet, reserved for heaven—not to be able to do wrong. Freedom does not consist in doing what I like—that turns out, in the long run, to be the most abject slavery, under the severest tyrants. But it consists in liking to do what I ought. When my wishes and God's will are absolutely coincident, then and only then, am I free. That is no prison, out of which we do not wish to go. Not to be confined against our wills, but voluntarily to elect to move only within the sacred, charmed, sweet circle of the discerned will of God, is the service and liberty of the sons of God.

Alas! there are a great many Christians, so-called, who know very little about such blessedness. To many of us religion is a burden. It consists of a number of prohibitions and restrictions and commandments equally unwelcome. "Do not do this," and all the while I would like to do it. "Do that," and all the while

I do not want to do it. "Pray, because it is your duty; go to chapel, because you think it is God's will; give money that you would much rather keep in your pockets; abstain from certain things that you hunger for; do other things that you do not at all desire to do, nor find any pleasure in doing." That is the religion of hosts of people. They have need to ask themselves whether their religion is Christ's religion. Ah! brethren!—"My yoke is easy and My burden light;" not because the things that He bids and forbids are less or lighter than those which the world's morality requires of its followers, but because, so to speak, the yoke is padded with the velvet of love, and inclination coincides, in the measure of our true religion, with the discerned will of God.

IV. Lastly, one word about the condition of the fulfilment of this promise to us.

As I have been saying, it is sadly far ahead of the experience of crowds of so-called Christians. There are still great numbers of professing Christians, and I doubt not that I speak to some such, on whose hearts only a very few of the syllables of God's will are written, and these very faintly and blotted. But remember that the fundamental idea of this whole context is that of a covenant, and a covenant implies two people, and duties and obligations on the part of each. If God is in covenant with you, you are in covenant with God. If He makes a promise, there is something for you to do in order that that promise may be fulfilled to you.

What is there to do? First, and last, and midst, keep close to Jesus Christ. In the measure in which we keep ourselves in continual touch with Him, will His

law be written upon our hearts. If we are for ever twitching away the paper; if we are for ever flinging blots and mud upon it, how can we expect the transcript to be clear and legible? We must keep still that God may write. We must keep near Him that He may write. We must wait habitually in His presence. When the astronomer wishes to get the image of some far-off star, invisible to the eye of sense, he regulates the motion of his sensitive plate, so that for hours it shall continue right beneath the unseen beam. So we have to still our hearts, and keep their plates—the fleshy tables of them—exposed to the heavens. Then the likeness of God will be stamped there.

Be faithful to what is written there, which is the Christian shape of the heathen commandment—"Do the duty that lies nearest thee; so shall the next become plainer." Be faithful to the line that is "written," and there will be more on the tablet to-morrow.

Now this is a promise for us all. However blotted and blurred and defaced by crooked, scrawling letters, like a child's copy-book, with its first pot-hooks and hangers, our hearts may be, there is no need for any of us to say despairingly, as we look on the smeared page, "What I have written I have written." He is able to blot it all out, to "take away the hand-writing"—our own—"that is against us, nailing it to His cross," and to give us, in our inmost spirits, a better knowledge of, and a glad obedience to, His discerned and holy will. So that each of us, if we like and will observe the conditions, may be able to say with all humility, "Lo! I come, in the volume of the book it is written of *me, I* delight to do Thy will, yea! Thy law is within *my* heart."

THE ARTICLES OF THE NEW COVENANT.

II. THEIR GOD, MY PEOPLE.

"I will be to them a God, and they shall be to Me a people."—HEB. viii. 10.

TWO mirrors set over against each other reflect one another and themselves in each other, in long perspective. Two hearts that love, with similar reciprocation of influence, mirror back to each other their own affections. "I am thine; thou art mine," is the very mother-tongue of love, and the source of blessedness. All loving hearts know that. This mutual surrender, and, in surrender, reciprocal possession, is lifted up here into the highest regions. "I will be their God, they shall be My people." That was the fundamental promise of the Mosaic dispensation, laid at Sinai—"Ye shall be unto Me a people for a possession." All through the Old Testament we find it re-echoed; and yet the interpenetration of God and the people was imperfect and external in that ancient covenant.

So, the writer here, falling back upon the marvellous prophecy of Jeremiah, regards this as being one of the characteristics of Christianity, that what was shadowed in Israel's possession of God and God's possession of Israel, is, in substance, blessedly and permanently realised in the relations of God to Christian souls, and of Christian souls to God.

Not only is there this mutual possession, as expressed by the two halves of my text, but each half, when cleft and analysed, reveals the necessity for a similar reciprocity. For God's giving of Himself to us is nothing to us without our taking of God for ours; and, in like manner, our giving of ourselves to God, would be all incomplete, unless, in His strange love, He stooped from amidst the praises of Israel to accept the poor gifts that we bring.

So the duality of my text breaks up into a double dualism, and we have God giving Himself to us, and His gift realised in our acceptance of Him for ours; and then we have our giving of ourselves to God, and the gift realised and ratified in His acceptance of us for His. And to these four points, briefly, I wish to turn:—

I. "I will be to them a God." That is God's gift of Himself to us.

The words go far deeper than the necessary Divine relation to all His creatures. He is a God to every star that burns, and to every worm that creeps, and to every gnat that dances for a moment. But there is a closer relation, and more blessed, than that. He is a God to every man that lives, lavishing upon him manifestations of His divinity, and sustaining him in life. But besides these great and wondrous universal relations which spring from the very fact of creative power and creatural dependence, there is a tenderer, a truer relationship of heart to heart, of spirit to spirit, which is set forth here, as the prerogative of the men that trust in Jesus Christ. The special does not contradict or deny the universal, the universal does not exclude the special —"I will be a God to them," in a deeper, more blessed,

soul-satisfying, and vital sense than to others around them.

And what lies in that great promise passes the wit of man and the tongues of angels, fully to conceive and tell. All that lies in that majestic monosyllable, which is shorthand for life, and light, and all perfectness, lived in a living person who has a heart, that word *God*,—all that is included in that name, God will be to you and me, if we like to have Him for such. "I will be a God to them"—then round about them shall be cast the bulwark of the everlasting arm and the everlasting purpose. "I will be a God to them"—then in all dark places there will be a light, and in all perplexities there will be a path, and in all anxieties there will be quietness, and in all troubles there will be a hidden light of joy, and in every circumstance life will be saturated with an Almighty presence, which shall make the rough places plain and the crooked things straight. "I will be a God to them"—then their desires, their hungerings after blessedness, their seekings after good need no longer roam open-mouthed and empty, throughout a waste world where there is only scanty fodder, enough to keep them from expiring, but never food enough to satisfy them; but in Him longings and hopes will all find their appropriate satisfaction. And there will be rest in God, and whatsoever aspirations after loftier goodness may have to be cherished, and whatsoever base hankerings still lingering have to be fought, the strength of a present God will enable us to aspire, and not to be disappointed, and to cast ourselves into the conflict, and be ever victorious. "I will be to them a God," is the same as to say that everything which my complex nature can require I shall find in Him.

It says, too, that all that Godhood, in all the incomprehensible sweep of its attributes, is on my side, if I will. They tell us that there are rays in the spectrum which no eye can see, but which yet have mightier chemical and other influences than those that are visible. The spectrum of God is not all visible, but beyond the limits of comprehension there lie dark energies which are full of blessedness and of power for us. "I will be to them a God." We can understand something of what that name signifies; and all that is enlisted for us. There is much which that name signifies that we do not understand, and all that, too, is working on our side.

Now, remember, that this giving of God to us by Himself is all concentrated in one historical act. He gave Himself to us, when He spared not His only begotten Son. My text is one of the articles of the new Covenant. And what sealed and confirmed all the articles of that Covenant? The blood of Jesus Christ. It was when "God spared not His own Son," and when the Son spared not Himself, on that cross of Calvary, that there came to pass the ratifying and filling out and perfecting of the ancient, typical promise, "I will be to them a God." *There* was the unspeakable gift in which God was given to humanity.

II. And now we have to take the giving God and make Him our God.

I need not do more than just glance for a moment at that thought, for it is familiar enough to us all. Here is a treasure of gold lying in the road. Anybody that picks it up may have it; the man that does not pick it up does not get it, though it is there for him to lay his fingers on. Here is a river flowing past your door. You

may put a pipe into it, and bring all its wealth and refreshment into your house, and use it for the quenching of your thirst, for the cleansing of your person, for the cooking of your victuals, for the watering of your gardens. And here is all the fulness of God welling past us. But Niagara may thunder close by a man's door, and he may perish of thirst. "I will be to them a God." What does that matter if I do not turn round and say: "O Lord! Thou art my God"? Nothing! Beggars come to your door, and you give them a bit of bread, and they go away, and you find it flung into the mud round the corner. God gives us Himself. I wonder how many of us have tossed the gift over the first hedge, and left it there. Yet all the while we are dying for want of it, and do not know that we are.

Brethren! you have to enclose a bit of the prairie, for your very own, and put a hedge round it, and cultivate it, and you will get abundant fruits. You have to translate "their," into the singular possessive pronoun, and say "mine," and put out the hand of faith, and make Him in very deed yours. Then, and only then, is this giving perfected.

III. In the third place, we have to give ourselves to God.

We begin—as our text, profoundly, with all its simplicity, begins—with an act of God to us. He enters into loving relations with me, and it is only when I am melted and encouraged by the perception and reception of these relations that there comes the answering throb in my heart. The mirror in our spirit has the other one reflected upon it; then it flings back its own reflection to the parent glass. God comes first with the love that He

pours over us poor creatures, and when "we have known and believed the love that God hath to us," then, and only then, do we throb back the reflected, ay, the kindred love. For love is the same thing in the Divine heart and in my heart. In the other bonds that unite men to God, what is man's corresponds to what is God's. My faith corresponds to His faithfulness. My dependence corresponds to His sufficiency. My weak clinging answers to His strong grasp; my obedience to His commanding. But my *love* not only corresponds to, as the concave does to the convex, but it assimilates to, and is the likeliest thing in the creature to, the love of the Creator. And so there is a parallel, wonderful and blessed, between the giving love which says "I will be to them a God," and the recipient love which responds, "We are to Thee a people."

Remember, too, that not only is there this general resemblance, but that our love manifests itself to God—I was going to say, just as God's love manifests itself to us, though, of course, there are differences that I do not need to touch upon here, in the act of self-surrender. He gave Himself to us. Ay! and we may use another form of speech still more emphatic, and say, He gave up Himself. For, surely, difficult as it may be for us to keep our footing in those lofty heights where the atmosphere is so rare, the gift of Jesus Christ was surrender; when the Father spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all.

And, brethren, what is the surrender of the man who receives the love of God? In what region of my nature is that giving up of myself most imperative and blessed? In my will. The will is the man. The centre-point of

every human being is the will, and it is no use for us to talk about our having given ourselves to God, in response and in thankfulness to His gift of Himself to us, unless we come and say "Lord! not my will, but Thine"; and bow ourselves in unreluctant and constant submission to His commandments, and to all His will. Brethren, we give ourselves to God when, moved by His giving of Himself to us, we yield up our love to Him, and love never rests until it has yielded up its will to the beloved. He, indeed, gives, asking for nothing; but He gives in a still deeper sense, asking for everything; and that everything is myself. And I yield myself to Him in the measure in which I set my thankful love upon Him, and then bow myself as His servant, in humble consecration to Himself, with all my heart and soul and mind and strength.

IV. Lastly, God takes us for His.

"They shall be My people." That is wonderful! It is strange that we can imitate God, in a certain fashion, in the gift of self; but it is yet more strange and blessed that God accepts that gift, and counts it as one of His treasures to possess us. One of the psalmists had a deep insight into the miracle of the Divine condescension when he said "He was extolled with *my* tongue." Strange that the loftiest of creatures should be lifted higher by the poor tremulous lever of *my* praises! and yet He is so. He takes as His, such poor creatures, full of imperfection, and tremulous faith, and disproved love, as you and I know ourselves to be, and He says "My people." "They shall be Mine," My jewels, says He, "in the day which I make." Oh! brethren! it sometimes seems to me that it is more wonderful that God

should take me for His than that He should give me Himself for mine.

Have you given yourself to Him? Have you begun where He begins, taking first the gift that is freely given to you of God, even Jesus Christ, in whom God dwells, and who makes all the Godhead yours, for your very own? Have you taken God for yours, by faith in that Lord "who loved me, and gave Himself, for me"? And then, smitten by His love, and having the chains of self melted by the fire of His great mercy, have you said, "Lo! truly I am Thy servant. Thou hast loosed my bonds"? Dear brethren, you never own yourselves till you give yourselves away; and you never will give yourselves to God, to be His, unless, with all your heart and strength, you cling to the rock-truth, that God has given Himself to every man that will take Him, in Jesus Christ, to be that man's God for ever and ever.

THE ARTICLES OF THE NEW COVENANT.

III. "ALL SHALL KNOW ME."

"They shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know Me, from the least to the greatest."—HEB. viii. 11.

IN former sermons I have tried to bring out the force of the preceding two articles of "the New Covenant." These two were the substitution of inward inclination and impulse for the rigid bonds of an external commandment, and the substitution of a real, spiritual, mutual possession of God and His people for the mere outward relationship that existed between Israel and Jehovah. My text is the third article of the New Covenant. It lays hold, like the other two, of something that characterised the ancient dispensation, declares its imperfection, recognises its prophetic aspect, and asserts that all which the former merely shadowed and foretold is accomplished in Jesus Christ.

In old days there had been some direct communication between God and a chosen few, the spiritual aristocracy of the nation, and they spake the things that they had heard of God to the multitude who had had no such communication. My text says that all this is swept away, and that the prerogative of every Christian man is direct access to, communication with, and instruction

from, God Himself. The text has two things in it: the promise, which is the essence of it, and a consequence which is deduced from that promise, and sets forth its results in a graphic manner. "They all shall know Me, from the least to the greatest"; that is the real promise. "They shall no more teach every man his neighbour . . . saying, Know the Lord," is but a result thereof.

I. Now, I ask you to look with me at what this great promise means.

"They shall know Me." Perhaps I can best explain what I take it to mean, by commencing with an analogy or two which may help us to apprehend what is the significance of these words. We all know the difference between *hearsay* and *sight*. We may have read books of travel, that tell of some scene of great natural beauty or historic interest, and may think that we understand all about it, but it is always an epoch when our own eyes look for the first time at the snowy summit of an Alp, or for the first time at the Parthenon on its rocky height. We all know the difference between *hearsay* and *experience*. We read books of the poets that pourtray love and sorrow, and the other emotions that make up our throbbing, changeful life; but we need to go through the mill ourselves, before we understand what the grip of the iron teeth of the harrow of affliction is, and we need to have had our own hearts dilated by a true and blessed affection, before we know the sweetness of love. Men may tell us about it, but we have to feel it ourselves before we know.

To come still closer to the force of my text, we all know the difference between hearing about a man and

making his acquaintance. We may have been told much about him, and be familiar with his character, as we think, but, when we come face to face with him, and actually for ourselves experience the magnetism of his presence, or fall under the direct influence of his character, then we know that our former acquaintance with him, by means of hearsay, was but superficial and shadowy. "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eyes see thee." Can you say that? If so, you understand my text;—"they shall no more teach every man . . . his brother, saying, Know the Lord, and make acquaintance with Him"—as if He were a stranger—for "all shall know Me, from the least to the greatest."

There is all the difference between knowing *about* God and knowing God; just the difference that there is between dogma and life, between theology and religion. We may have all articles of the Christian creed clear in our understandings, and may owe our possession of them to other people's teaching; we may even, in a sense, believe them, and yet they may be absolutely outside of our lives. And it is only when they pass into the very substance of our being, and influence the springs of our conduct—it is only then that we know God.

Now, I maintain that this acquaintance with Him is what is meant in our text. It may not include any more intellectual propositions about Him than a man had before he knew Him, but it has turned doctrines into fact, and instead of the mere hearsay and traditional religion, which is the only religion of millions, it has brought the true heart-grasp of Him, which is the only thing worth calling a knowledge of God. For let me

remind you that, whilst we may know a science or proposition by the exercise of our understandings in appropriate ways, that is not how we know people. And God is a person, and to know Him does not mean to understand *about* Him, but to be on speaking terms with Him, to have a familiar acquaintance with Him, to "summer and winter" with Him, and so, by experience to verify the things that before were mere doctrines. Now, at least the large majority of you call yourselves believers in Christianity. I want you to ask yourselves, and I would ask myself, whether my religion is knowing *about* God or knowing Him; whether it is all made up of a set of truths which I assent to, mainly because I am not sufficiently interested in them to contradict them, or whether these truths have become the very substance of my life. I do not believe in a religion without a dogma—I was going to say, I believe still less in a dogma without religion; and that is the Christianity of hosts of professing Christians. It is as useless as are the dried seeds that rattle in the withered head of a poppy in the autumn, or as the shrivelled kernel that sounds in the hollowness of a half-empty nut.

Remember, dear brethren, that to know God is to become acquainted with Him, and that only on the path of such familiar, friendly, loving intercourse and communion with Him, can men find the confirmation of the truths about Him which make up the eternal revelation of Him in the Gospel. "We know"—that is a valid certainty, arising from experience, and it has as good a right to call itself knowledge as have the processes by which men come to be sure about the

physical facts of this material universe. Nay! I would even go further, and say that the fact that such a continual stream of witnesses, through all the generations, have been able to say, "I have tasted and I have seen that God is good," is to be taken into account by all impartial searchers after truth. And if men want to square their creeds with all the facts of humanity, let them not omit, in their consideration of the claims of Christian evidence, this fact, that from generation to generation men have said, and their lives have witnessed to its truth, "We know in whom we have believed, and that He is able to keep us. We know that we are of God." Dear brethren! the whole case for Christianity *cannot* be appreciated from outside. "Taste and see." My text shows us the more true way. If we will accept that covenant we shall know the Lord in the depths of our hearts.

II. Notice how far this promise extends.

"They all, from the least to the greatest, shall know." There is to be no distinction of rank or age, or endowment, which shall result in some of the people of God having a position from which any of the others are altogether shut out.

The writer is, of course, contrasting in his mind, though he does not express the contrast, the condition of things of old, when, as I said, the spiritual aristocracy of the nation received communications which they then imparted to their fellows. In the morning dawn the highest summits catch the rays first, but as the sun rises it floods the lower levels, and at mid-day shines right down into the depths of the cavities. So the world is now flooded with the light of Christ; and

all Christian men and women, by virtue of their Christian character, do possess the unction from the Holy One, in which lie the potency and the promise of the knowledge of all things that are needful to be known for life and godliness. This is the true democracy of the Gospel—the universal possession of the life of Christ through the Spirit.

Now, if that be so, then it is by no means a truth to be kept simply for the purpose of fighting against ecclesiastical or sacerdotal encroachments and denials of it, but it ought to be taken as the candle of the Lord, by each of us, and in the light of it we ought to search very rigidly, and very often, our own Christian character and experiences. You, dear brethren, with whom I am most closely associated here, you professing Christians of this congregation—do you know anything about that inward knowledge of God which comes from friendship with Him, and speaks irrefragable certainties in the heart which receives it? "If any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of His." If you owe all your knowledge of, and your faith in, the great verities of the Gospel, and the loving personality of God, to the mere report of others, if you cannot verify these by your own experience, if you cannot say, "Many things I know not; you can easily puzzle me with critical and philosophical subtleties, but this one thing I do know, that whereas I was blind, now I see"—if you cannot say that, I pray you, bethink yourselves whether your religion is not mainly a form, and how far it has any life in it at all.

But whilst thus the great promise of my text, in its very blessedness and fulness, does carry with it some

solemn suggestions for searching self-examination, it also points in another direction. For consider what it excludes, and what it permits, in the way of brotherly help and guidance. It certainly excludes, on the one hand, all assumption of authority over the consciences and the understandings of Christian people, on the part either of churches or individuals, and it makes short work of all claims that there continues a class of persons officially distinguished from their brethren, and having closer access to God than they. The true understanding of these words of my text, the recognition of the universality of the knowledge of God in all Christian people, has great revolutionary work yet to do amongst the churches of Christendom. For I do not know that there are any of them that have sufficiently recognised this principle. Not only in a church where there is a priesthood and an infallible head of the Church on earth, nor only in churches that are bound by human creeds imposed on them by men, but also in churches like ours, where there is no formal recognition of either of these two errors, the practical contradiction of this article of the new Covenant is apt to creep in. It is a great deal more the fault of the people than of the priest, a great deal more the fault of the congregation than of the pastor, when they are lazily contented to take all their religion at second-hand from him, and to shuffle all the responsibility off their own shoulders on to his. If my text obliges me, and all men who stand in my position, to say with the Apostle, "Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy," it obliges you, dear brethren, to take nothing from me, or any man, on our bare words, nor to exalt

any of us into a position which would contradict the great principle of my text, but yourselves, at first hand, to go to God, and get straight from Him the teaching which He only can give. Dominion and subjection, authority and submission to men, in any part of the church, are shut out, by such words as these.

But brotherly help is not shut out. If a party of men are climbing a hill, and one is in advance of his fellows, when he reaches the summit, he may look down and call to those below, and tell them how fair and wide the view is, and beckon them to come and give them a helping hand up. So, because Christian men vary, in the extent to which they possess and utilise the one gift of knowledge of God, and some of them are in advance of the others, it is all in accordance with the principle of my text that they that are in advance should help their brethren, and give them a brotherly hand. Not as if my brother's word can give me the inward knowledge of God, but it may help me to get that knowledge for myself. We—I speak now as a member of the preaching class—we can but do what the friend of the bridegroom does; he brings the bride to her lover, and then he shuts the door and leaves the two to themselves. That is all that any of us can do. You must yourself draw the water from the well of salvation. We can only tell you, "there *is* the well, and the water is sweet."

III. Lastly, the means by which this promise is fulfilled.

I have already pointed out, in previous sermons, that the conception of the Gospel as a new covenant was endorsed by Jesus Christ Himself, in words which tell us how all these blessings that are set forth in this

context are secured and brought to men—when, in the institution of the Lord's Supper, He spoke of "the new Covenant in His blood." So I set first and foremost, above all other means, this one great truth, that all this inward knowledge of God, which is the prerogative of every Christian man, is made possible and actual for any of us, only by and through the mission, and especially the death, of Jesus Christ our Lord. For therein does He set forth God to be known as nothing else but that supreme suffering and supreme self-surrender upon the cross, ever can do or has done. We know God as He would have us know Him, only when we see Jesus suffering and dying for us; and then adoringly, as one in the presence of a mystery into which he can but look a little way, say that even there and then "he that hath seen that Christ hath seen the Father."

Jesus Christ's blood, the seal of the Covenant, is the great means by which this promise is fulfilled, inasmuch as in that death He sweeps away all the hindrances which bar us out from the knowledge of God. The great, dark wall of my sin rises between me and my Father. Christ's blood, like some magic drops upon a fortification, causes all the black barrier to melt away like a cloud; and the access to the throne of God is patent, even for sinful creatures like us. The veil is rent, and by that blood we have access into the holiest of all.

Christ is the source of this knowledge of God, inasmuch, further, as by His mission and death there is given to the whole world, if it will receive it, and to all who exercise faith in His name, the gift of that Divine

Spirit who teaches in the inmost spirit the true knowledge of His Son.

And so, dear brethren, since it is in the incarnate and dying Christ that all knowledge of God is brought to men, that all possibility of friendship and communion between men and God is rooted, and that the Divine Spirit who leads us into the deep things of God is granted to each of us, there follows the plain conclusion that the one way by which every man and woman on earth may find him and herself included within that "all, from the least to the greatest," is simply trust in Christ Jesus, in whom, in whose life, in whose death, God is made known, our alienation is swept away, and the Spirit of God, the Divine Teacher, is granted to us all.

Only, remember that my text stands in close connection with the preceding articles of this Covenant, and that to delight in the law of the Lord is the sure way to know more of the Lord. One act of obedience from the heart will teach us more of God than all the sages can. It is more illuminating simply to do as He willed than to read and think and speculate and study. "If any man wills to do His will, he shall know of the teaching." And mutual possession of God by us, and of us by God, leads to fuller knowledge. To possess God is to love Him; and "he that loveth knoweth God, yea! rather is known of God."

So, dear brethren, do not be content with traditional religion, with a hearsay Christianity. "Acquaint now thyself with Him," and be at peace. Oh! there is nothing sweeter to a true preacher of Christ and His salvation than that those to whom he preaches should be able to do without him. It is my business to point

you away from myself, however much I prize your love and confidence, as I ought to do; and to beseech you, for your own soul's sake, that you would by faith in Christ attain that knowledge of the only true God which He is sent to give. Then you will be able to say, "Now, we believe not because of thy saying, for we have heard Him ourselves, and know that this is, indeed, the Christ, the Saviour of the world."

THE ARTICLES OF THE NEW COVENANT.

IV. FORGIVENESS THE FUNDAMENTAL BLESSING.

"For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more."—HEB. viii. 12.

WE have been considering, in successive sermons, the great promises preceding my text, which are the articles of the New Covenant. We reach the last of these in this discourse. It is last in order of enumeration because it is first in order of fulfilment. The foundation is dug down to and discovered last, because the stones of it were laid first. The introductory "for" in my text shows that the fulfilment of all the preceding great promises depends upon and follows the fulfilment of this, the greatest of them. Forgiveness is the keystone of the arch. Strike it out, and the whole tumbles into ruin. Forgiveness is the first gift to be received from the great cornucopiæ of blessings which the Gospel brings for men. The writer is tracing the stream upwards, and therefore he comes last to that which first gushes out from the Divine heart. All these previous promises of delight in the law of the Lord, mutual possession between God and His people, knowledge of God, which is based upon love, are consequences of this final article, "I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their iniquities will I remember no more."

I. So, then, we remark, first, that forgiveness deals with man's deepest need.

It is fundamental, because it grapples with the true evil of humanity, which is not sorrow, but is sin. All men have "come short of the glory of God," and that fact, the fact of universal sinfulness, is the gravest fact of man's condition; for it affects his whole nature, and it disturbs and perverts all his relations to God. And so, if men would rightly diagnose the disease of humanity, they must recognise something far deeper than skin-deep symptoms, and discover that it is sin which is the source of all human misery and sorrow. To deal with humanity and to forget or ignore the true source of all the misery in the world—namely, the fact that we "have all sinned and come short of the glory of God"—is absurd. "Miserable comforters are ye all," if, pottering over the patient, you apply ointment to pimples when he is dying of cancer. I know, of course, that a great deal may be done, and that a great deal is to-day being done, to diminish the sum of human wretchedness; and I am not the man to say one word that shall seem to under-estimate or pour cold water upon any of these various schemes of improvement, philanthropic, social, economic, or political, but I do humbly venture to say that any of them, and all of them put together, if they do not grapple with this fact of man's sin, are dealing with the surface and leaving the centre untouched. Sin does not come only from ignorance, and therefore it cannot be swept away by knowledge It does not come only from environment, and therefore it cannot be taken out of human history by improvement of circumstances. It does not come from poverty, and

therefore economical changes will not annihilate it. The root of it lies far deeper than any of these things. The power which is to make humanity blessed must dig down to the root and grasp that, and tear it up, and eject it from the heart of man before society can be thoroughly healed.

Now, what does Christianity do with this central part of human experience? My text tells us partly, and only partly, "I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more." Of course, the Divine oblivion is a strong metaphor for the treatment of man's sins as non-existent. It is the same figure, in a somewhat different application, as is found in the great promise, "I will cast their sins behind My back into the depths of the sea." It is the same metaphor as is suggested in a somewhat different application, by the other saying, "Blessed is the man whose sin is covered." And the fact that underlies the metaphors of forgetfulness or burying in the ocean depths, or covering over so as to be invisible, is just this, that God's love flows out to the sinful man, unhindered by the fact of his transgression.

If Christian people, and doubters about Christian truth, would understand the depth and loftiness of the Christian idea of forgiveness, there would be less difficulty felt about it. For pardon is not the same thing as the removal of the consequences of wrong doing. It is so in regard of the mere outward judicial procedure of nations, but it is not so in the family. The father often pardons, and says that he does before he punishes. And it is the same with God. The true notion and essence of forgiveness, as the Bible conceives it, is not the putting

aside of consequences, but the flow of the Father's heart to the erring child.

Sin is a great black dam, built up across the stream, but the flood of love from God's heart rises over it, and pours across it, and buries it beneath the victorious, full waters of the "river of God." Here is a world wrapped in mist, and high above the mist the unbroken sunshine of the Divine love pours down upon the upper layer, and thins and thins and thins it until it disappears, and the full sunshine floods the rejoicing world, and the ragged fragments of the mist melt into the blue. "I have blotted out as a cloud thy sins and as a thick cloud thy transgressions." The outward consequences of forgiven sin may have to be reaped. If a man has lived a sensuous life, no repentance, no forgiveness, will prevent the drunkard's hand from trembling, or cure the corrugations of his liver. If a man has sinned, no Divine forgiveness will ever take the memory of his transgressions, nor their effects, out of his character. But the Divine forgiveness may so modify the effects as that, instead of past sin being a source of torment or a tyrant which compels to future similar transgressions, pardoned sin will become a source of lowly self-distrust, and may even tend to increase in goodness and righteousness. When bees cannot remove some corruption out of the hive they cover it over with wax, and then it is harmless, and they can build upon it honey-bearing cells. Thus it is possible that, by pardon, the consequences which must be reaped may be turned into occasions for good.

But the act of the Divine forgiveness does annihilate the deepest and the most serious consequences of my sin; for hell is separation from God, the sense of discord

and alienation between Him and me; and all these are swept away.

So here is the foundation blessing, which meets man's deepest need. And be sure of this, that any system which cannot grapple with it will never avail for the necessities of a sinful world. Unless our new evangelists can come to us with as clear an utterance as this of my text, they will work their enchantments in vain; and the world will be the old sad, miserable world, after all that they can do.

II. This forgiveness is attained through Christ, and through Him only.

I have tried to show in former sermons, that the whole of these promises of what our writer calls "the new covenant," are, as our Lord Himself said, sealed "in His blood." And that is especially true in reference to this promise of forgiveness. It is in Christ Jesus, and in Christ Jesus alone, that that pardon which my text speaks of is secured to men.

I need not dwell upon the Scriptural statements to this effect, but I desire to emphasise this thought, that the Christian teaching of forgiveness is based upon the conception of Christ's work and especially of Christ's death, as being the Atonement for the world's sin. It is because, and only because, "He bore our sins in His own body on the tree," that the full-toned Gospel proclamation can be rung out to men, that God "remembers their transgressions no more." Unless that foundation be firmly laid in the New Testament conception of the meaning and power of the death of Christ, I know not where there is a basis for the proclamation to man of Divine forgiveness.

Of course, my text itself does show that the very

common misrepresentation of the New Testament evangelical teaching about this matter is a misrepresentation. It is often objected to that teaching that it alleges that Christ's sacrifice effected a change in the Divine heart and disposition, and made God love men whom He did not love before. The mighty "I will" of my text makes no specific reference to Christ's death, and rather implies what is the true relation between the love of God and the death of Jesus Christ, that God's love was the originating cause, of which Christ's death was the redeeming effect. "He so loved the world that He gave His . . . Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should . . . have eternal life." And no wise evangelical teacher ever has asserted, or does assert, anything else than that the mission of Jesus Christ is the consequence, and not the cause, of the Father's love to sinful men.

But that being kept distinctly in view, I suppose I need not remind you how, like the strand that runs through the cables of the Royal Navy, the red thread of Christ's sacrifice for the sins of the whole world runs through the whole of the New Testament. It is fashionable nowadays to say that no theory of the Atonement is needed in order that men should receive the benefit of Christ's work. That is partially true, in so far as that no human conceptions will exhaust the fulness of that great work, nor can penetrate to all its depths. But it is not true, as I humbly take it, inasmuch as if a man is to get the forgiveness that comes through Jesus Christ, he must have this theory, that "Christ died *for our sins* according to the Scriptures." And that is the teaching of the whole New Testament.

I need not remind you how all Paul's writing is

saturated with it, but I may remind you that to people who were very lynx-eyed critics of him, and of his teaching, he said, about that very statement that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures—"whether it were they or I, so we preach." And his appeal to the consensus and unanimity of the apostles is amply vindicated by the documents that still remain. We are told that there are types of teaching in the New Testament. There are, and very beautifully they vary, and very harmoniously they blend. But there are no diversities in regard to this matter. If Paul says, "In whom we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of our sins," Peter says, "He bare our sins in His own body on the tree;" and John says, "He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for our sins only, but also for the sins of the whole world." And if, as I believe, the book of the Revelation is his, the vision that John saw in the heavens was the vision of "a Lamb as it had been slain;" and the song which he heard rising from immortal lips was of praise unto Him that "hath loosed us from our sins by His own blood."

"So they preached." God grant that it may be true of all of us; "so we believe." For, brethren, this clear, certain statement of the Gospel of forgiveness through Jesus Christ is the characteristic glory of the whole revelation. Without it, apart from Him and His Cross, I do not know how the hope of forgiveness can be more than dim and doubtful. I know not how any man that has once felt the grip of evil on his inclinations, and the responsibility and guilt which he has drawn down upon his head by his transgressions, can find a firm footing for his assurance of pardon, apart from the Cross of Jesus

Christ. Without that, the Divine forgiveness is but a peradventure, sometimes a hope, sometimes an illusion. The men that reject Christianity for the most part proclaim the gospel of despair, "Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap," in such a sense as to annihilate the possibility of pardon. But in Christ we understand that we may reap these fruits, and yet be pardoned. "Thou wast a God that forgavest them, and tookest vengeance of their inventions." Forgiveness apart from Christ stands, as it seems to me, in no intelligible relation to the Divine character. And, apart from Christ, forgiveness is apt to dwindle down, and to be degraded into mere lazy tolerance of evil, and to make God a good-natured, indifferent Sovereign, who does not so very much mind whether His subjects do His will or not.

But when we can say, "He died for my sins," then we can see that the Divine righteousness and the Divine love are but two names for one thing, and forgiveness lifts us into a region of higher purity. Christianity alone teaches the loftiest ideal of human righteousness, the loftiest conception of the Divine character, the absolute inflexibility of the Divine law and withal full, free pardon. It stands alone in the sombre aspect under which it contemplates humanity, and the boundless hope of its possibilities which it entertains. It stands alone in that forgiveness is the means to higher holiness; and in that, pardoning, it heals, and whispers "Go thy way; sin no more, lest a worse thing befall thee." Therefore is it a Gospel; therefore is it the new covenant in His blood.

III. Lastly, this forgiveness is fundamental to all other Christian blessings.

As I have said, the very structure of our text shows that that was the writer's idea. There can be no "delight in the law of the Lord," which is the first of the articles of the new covenant, until there is the taking away of the sin which deepens aversion to God's law, and until the Lawgiver has become beloved for the sake of His received forgiveness. Then we shall delight in the law when we love the lips that proclaim it, because before they issued commandments they decreed absolution, and declared "Neither do I condemn thee."

Forgiveness precedes the second of these covenant blessings—viz., mutual possession between God and His people. For so long as there remains unforgiven sin in a man's heart, it comes like a film of atmospheric air or grains of dust between two polished metal plates, forbidding their adhesion; and only when it is taken away will they come together and abide united. It lies at the foundation of, and must precede, all that true knowledge of God, which is the third of the articles of the covenant, and is a consequence of love and communion. "For how can two walk together except they be agreed?" Until my sin is taken from me the eyes of my soul are dim; and I know not God in deep reciprocal possession and continual love. And so with all other of the blessings and the hopes which Christian men are entitled to cherish by reason of this covenant of God's changeless love.

I need not dwell upon them, but I would leave with you these thoughts. A Christianity which does not begin with the proclamation of forgiveness is impotent. Again, a Christianity which does not base forgiveness on Christ's sacrifice is impotent, also. The history of the

Church shows that preachers and teachers and churches that do not know what to say when a poor soul comes to them and asks, "What must I do to be saved?" are of no use, or next to none. The man in whom the devils are says to such maimed representations of the Gospel, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are ye?" and leaps upon them, and overcomes them. The whole experience of the past demonstrates that. And so one laments the vagueness and the faltering in proclaiming this truth so common in this day. Brethren, I, for my part, believe that the only type of Christianity which will win men's hearts is that modelled on the pattern of the New Testament teaching which begins with the fact of sin, and, having dealt with that, then goes on to bestow all other blessings.

But do not forget another thing, that a Christianity which does not build holiness, delight in God's law, conscious possession of Him and possession by Him, and deep, blessed knowledge of Him, on forgiveness, is wofully imperfect. And that is the Christianity of a great many of us. Here is the first round of the ladder: "I will remember their iniquities no more." Put your foot upon that and then begin to ascend; and do not stop till you have reached the top, whence His face looks down, and whence you can step on to the stable standing-ground beside His very throne. Begin with forgiveness, and all these blessings shall be added unto you, if you keep the covenant of your God.

THE SOUL'S VISION AND HEARING OF JESUS.

'And Jesus said unto him, Thou hast both seen Him, and it is He that talketh with thee."—JOHN ix. 37.

WE have, in our Lord's interview with this sturdy blind man, a very remarkable exception to His usual methods. Generally, He was himself reticent about His Messiahship, and enjoined silence concerning it on those who believed it. Here He devotes Himself to bringing this man up to the confession that He is the Christ, and makes to him one of the only two articulate utterances claiming Messiahship which fell from His lips, in addition to those confided to the immediate circle of His disciples. The reason for that is not far to seek.

This blind man, cast out from the synagogue, was found by Christ, and the question was put to him, "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" In beautiful contrast to the calm, collected self-reliance with which he had fronted the council and endured unmoved the brow-beating of the Sanhedrim, he falls, as it were, at Christ's feet in humble docility: "Who is He, that I might believe on Him?" Was that credulity? Certainly not. He had a very good reason absolutely to trust Jesus Christ, as he does in these great words:

"Tell me anything; and whatsoever Thou dost say I will accept." Therefore he gets the full-toned confession, "Thou hast both seen Him, and it is He that talketh with thee."

Now, the other instance where our Lord thus plainly revealed Himself as Messiah to comparative outsiders is also in this gospel; and it presents a remarkable parallel, and almost verbal identity, with the words before us. To the Samaritan woman Christ said, "I that speak unto thee, am He"; to this man, "It is He that talketh with thee"; the fact of their having free conversation with the long-hoped-for Messiah being dwelt on in both cases. But the fact that "thou hast *seen* Him" is added in the case of the lately blind man, and with great beauty points to the miracle as not only a proof of His Messiahship, but also as a call for the healed man's grateful love. It we take the text in connection with that other confession of Messiahship, we may get light upon several important things.

I. We see here the kind of people to whom Christ delights to make frank revelations of Himself.

Take this man before us as an illustration. He is sturdy, absolutely sincere, not to be cajoled, or brow-beaten, or tempted, or coaxed into saying a single word beyond what he knew, but standing firmly, on his own two feet, on the solid basis of experienced fact, and refusing to be tempted one hair's-breadth beyond that. And when the doctors try to over-awe him by their superior knowledge, he coolly replies, "You seem to know a great deal. It is very strange that you do not know this. *I know*, by a better way than you

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know, for my knowledge is living knowledge, flowing from experience."

Note again, how this man was faithful to the growing light as it dawned upon him. He passed through three stages in his notions about Jesus Christ. "The *man* that is called Jesus anointed mine eyes"—he began with that. And, as he thought a little more, he answered the question "What sayest thou of Him"? with the further recognition, "He is a prophet!" And opposition and cavilling only rooted him more firmly in, and gave him a wider perception of, what was involved in his primary experience of receiving sight—"If this Man were not from God He could do nothing." "The man called Jesus"—"a prophet"—one "from God"—on these convictions he stands, and nothing will shake him. He obeys the light that he has. He is absolutely faithful to it. He will neither smother it nor exaggerate it, but he holds to it with a grasp that nothing and nobody can loose. They fling him out of the synagogue, but he clutches his truth. And so Jesus Christ comes to him and says, "Dost thou believe on the Son of Man?" "Lord, who is He?" He was ready to accept anything that his healer told him; and, whatever it was, he would grapple it to his heart, and live upon and obey it. Therefore the Master turned the whole light of His face upon him, and said, "I am He!"

Nobody else but one poor, profligate, Samaritan woman heard such words from His lips. The lesson from these facts is that, if we want Christ to be on frank, confidential terms with us, we must hold faithfully by whatsoever we already see to be the will and the message of God,

and we must be lovingly prepared to accept whatever Jesus Christ says, whether it confirms or contradicts our present prejudices or opinions, and to "follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth." Our attitude must be one—if I may use grand words—of spiritual receptivity of all Christ's teaching. Or, to put it into plainer words, our attitude must just be the old, commonplace, familiar one, "Speak! Lord! For Thy servant heareth."

Then, no matter though we are excommunicated by the Sanhedrim—that will not interfere with Christ's talking to us. No matter for the black specks on the record of our past lives, as that of the profligate Samaritan woman that had five husbands, and was living with a sixth man that was not her husband. No matter though we may belong to a set of people on whom the sacerdotal and orthodox officials look down with contempt, as they did on the Samaritans of old. If Christ sees in us honest, faithful obedience to what we know, and earnest longing that more light may break upon our paths, and willingness to believe every word of His, then anything is possible rather than that He should lock His lips when we say, "What is it, Lord, that I might believe?" No! never can it so be! He will answer, as He answered the outcast Samaritan and the excommunicated blind man.

II. Now, take another point. *How* does Christ show Himself to such people?

Did you ever notice how exquisitely beautiful the addition in my text is to the words which He used to the woman of Samaria? To her He simply said, "I that talk with thee am He." To the man who had only had a pair of eyes that could see anything for some four-

and-twenty hours, He said, "Thou hast *seen* Him." And was not that enough to prove His claim? "Thou hast seen Him." He gave you the eyes to see; now He has given you the Christ to look at. "Thou hast both seen Him, and it is He that talketh with thee."

There are two things, revelation by vision and revelation by word. And although I know, of course, that He is "the Christ, whom having not seen we love, in whom, though now we see Him not, yet believing we rejoice," I am bold to say that we too, if we cultivate the temper about which I have been speaking, as exemplified by these two people, may have as true vision of Christ as if—ay! far more truly than if—our outward eyes had beheld His bodily form. To us, too, if we will penetrate to the depths and realities of the relation that subsists between Christ and a believing soul—to us, too, He gives new faculties, and He gives the object for them. He gives us eyes to see, and He gives us Himself to behold.

For, be sure of this, that the perception of Christ's real presence and work with us and on us, which is made ours through faith, is as real, as direct, and, I believe, a great deal more reliable, than the thing that we call "sight," which is secured by the play of a material beam of light upon nerves that may be diseased, and may carry erroneous messages to the brain.

"Seeing is believing." Ah! turn it about the other way: "Believing is seeing." Jesus Christ will reveal Himself to "that inner eye which is the bliss of solitude" and the joy of the Christian life—will reveal Himself to that inward eye so clearly, so closely, so certainly as there will be no room left for doubt. Christian men and

women, we are not truly Christians until we have translated the words of Revelation into the facts of our experience, and until we have for ourselves seen the Lord, and for ourselves rejoiced in the vision of the Christ.

But this vision is not granted to men who do not pass through the discipline of which I have already spoken. And if we are for ever feasting the eyes of our souls and the desires of our hearts upon the things that are seen and temporal, we cannot see the things that are unseen and eternal. If you arrange the focus of your telescope so as that it shall command nearer objects, when you turn it to the more distant and more real ones there will be but mist. They make field-glasses with an arrangement by which you turn a screw, and one set of glasses is for "field," and another for "sea," and another for "theatre." So we have to change the focus of our eyes, if we are to "see the King in His beauty, and the land that is very far off." Whilst we look not at the things that are seen, but at the things that are not seen, "for the things that are seen are temporal, and the things that are not seen are eternal," Christ will show us Himself if we will only use the eyes which He has given to us all when we turn from darkness to light. He is come that they that are blind might see, and if we look we shall behold.

Further, "thou hast both seen Him, and it is He that *talketh* with thee." The word that is used here in the original conveys not only the idea of speech, but of familiar, frank conversation, such as two friends might have with one another. And, as I have said about sight, so I say about speech,—all deep Christian experience

verifies the allegation that our communion with Jesus Christ is not a monologue, with all the speech on our side, and none on His, but that He, too, speaks to us, in the depths of our hearts, in many a holy thought breathed into our minds, in illuminations given to us beyond our will, with regard to duty, and sometimes with regard to truth. But in whatsoever way He speaks to His friends, sure I am that we have not got to the depths of the possible blessedness of the Christian life, unless we know something of the whispers of "the still small voice" in our spirits, and have "heard Christ, and been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus."

I fear, that in speaking thus, I am transcending the experience of many professing Christians, partly, perhaps, because they have not been accustomed to trace these inward whispers to their true source; and partly, also, because they have not come near enough to Jesus Christ to hear Him, unless He speaks in thunders of judgment and of terror. But all love delights to whisper, and Christ delights to speak low into the ear that is close to His lips, as He did to the beloved disciple, who laid his head on the Master's bosom, at the table in the upper room.

Dear brethren, Christ has not fallen dumb. He is still the Incarnate Word, and His very life's energy, so to speak, is to impart Himself. Only let us still the tumult within, and we shall hear the Voice. Let us clap a muzzle and a gag on the yelping passions in the kennel of our hearts. Let us try sometimes to get the roar of the Niagara of business and daily life out of our ears, and then we shall hear the voice that speaks in the silences. Christ still "speaketh from Heaven," and, though His voice does not yet "shake the earth," it

enters into, and enlightens, and calms the spirit of the listener.

III. The last point that I would suggest is the glad certitude and deepened faith that result from Christ's speech and the sight of Him.

This man could have argued for a month with the Rabbis, and would probably have had the better of them at the end of it. But, when Jesus Christ says, "It is He that talketh with thee," the Master has got inside all his fences, and straight to his heart; and he has not another word to say except, "Lord! I believe"; "and he worshipped Him."

Which, being turned into a principle, is this. Get, as we all may if we like, that first-hand familiarity of personal intercourse with Christ, and see Him, as we may if we will, and we shall not want any more arguments and logical defences of our faith. So we can let the world babble as it likes, and all doubtful questions be settled as they may; for our faith, which goes down far deeper than questions and arguments and logic, down to the fact of what we have felt, stands untouched by any of them. Why should Christian people, who may assure themselves of Christ by the very same process by which they assure themselves that they are alive, because they feel that they are—why should they be so desperately frightened about every new heresy that starts up, and put themselves into a pucker, as if the ark of the Lord was going to be destroyed, when it is only the cart that carries it that shakes a bit? We may go far deeper than all the region of controversy, down to the facts of life. We may have the witness in ourselves, and say to everybody that questions us, "I am ignorant of a great deal, but I know

this, that He hath opened mine eyes; and with my opened eyes I saw Him. He hath touched mine ears, and with my purged ears I heard Him. Therefore, you may talk till doomsday, and not convince me that I was mistaken in that which is the very basis and rock-foundation of my life." "I know in whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him until that day."

WHAT JESUS SAID ABOUT HIS FIRST COMING.

"I proceeded forth, and came from God."—JOHN viii. 42.

"BACK to Jesus," is the watchword of a growing and influential school to-day. There is a great deal in the cry, and in the drift of thought which it represents, with which every wise Christian must be in sympathy. But it covers very different tendencies. In some cases it means reverent submission to Jesus Christ, and acceptance of all His words. In some cases it is associated with a very free and arbitrary handling of the gospels, which substantially results in the rejection, as not genuine, of all Christ's sayings that point in the direction of His supernatural origin or Divine power. The underlying motive in such cases is the wish to get away from the epistles back to the supposed simpler teaching of the Sage and Saint of Nazareth. "Back to Jesus" means, in many cases, "get rid of Paul, and keep only as much of Matthew and the other Evangelists as may yield the image of a humanitarian Christ." Doctrinal prepossessions lie below the critical processes.

But it is somewhat strange that those who go furthest in the direction of this free-and-easy handling of the records seem to proceed upon the principle that, if once we can get at what Jesus said and thought about Himself

and His mission, we have got to absolute truth. Now, that is strange, and especially strange from their point of view. For we do not generally accept a man's estimate of himself, especially if it is a high one, as conclusive. Experience has taught us to take the Pharisee's short way of dealing with such claims. "Thou bearest record of Thyself; Thy record is not true." But the world is ready to take Christ at His own valuation. How comes that?

Now *I* want to go "back to Christ" to-night; and to collect what He Himself said about His mission. My subject is not the single saying that I have read, but the whole class of passages to which it belongs. They are somewhat numerous; and, unless I am very much mistaken, they lay deep and broad and unshakable the foundation for the very conception of Christ which the doctrinal epistles draw out into distinct statements. If Jesus said about Himself and His work what the gospels unanimously report Him to have said, or anything like it, then the doctrines of Paul, and Peter and the Epistle to the Hebrews, and John, are the only adequate explanation, and they are *but* the explanation, of His claims.

Now, with these preliminary remarks let me try to gather these sayings of the Lord about Himself and His work under two or three heads, which may classify them, and help us.

I. First, then, they give us Christ's own estimate of His heavenly origin and worldwide significance.

It is very remarkable that He only once speaks of having been "born," and that was under circumstances, as I shall have to show you presently—which explain

the unusual expression. But at all other times it is either "I come," "I am come," "the Son of man came"; or it is "I am sent." Now that may be purely accidental, and it is quite conceivable that a man might drop into such a form of speech, if he were profoundly conscious of having a great work to do in the world, without any notion of thereby claiming anything extraordinary beyond the fact of his mission. But the persistent, exclusive use of the term does seem to indicate that Jesus Christ meant to claim something more than is common to humanity. And the presumption that He did so is elevated into certainty if you will notice, and bear with me whilst I adduce, two or three instances in which He expands the expression, so as to give us a glimpse of the fulness of its contents.

One of these is this word of my text: "I proceeded forth"; that points to a condition in which He was before His earthly appearance, and which He voluntarily left. "I came from God"; that points to His earthly life as being the permanent result of an initial act, which was voluntary and His own, and behind which stretched an indefinite existence. That is fair commenting, and nothing more.

The presumption is made still more certain if we turn to another scene, where, to soothe His sorrowing friends in the upper chamber, He said, "I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world." There was one solemn motion, self-originated, and its two termini were the Father, beyond the reach of sight, and the world, the scene of His visible manifestation. And that solemn motion necessarily involved the turning upon itself, and the returning to the Source, as He goes on to say, "Again,

I leave the world, and go unto the Father." The same "I" vibrates between the unseen abode with the Father, and the visible manifestation upon earth; and the same volition is at work in the coming into, and the departing from, this earthly scene.

Again, I point to other words, spoken in strangely different circumstances, and, therefore, with an entirely different colouring. To the Roman governor, which his half-amused contempt for the tatterdemalion of a King that stood before him, and his scornful question, in the full flush of conscious, vulgar, material power, "Art *thou* a King, then?" He answered, "To this end was I born" —that was all that Pilate could understand—"and for this cause came I into the world," why was that added? Was it a synonym for being born? No! It was something that lay behind the birth. And, if I might venture to say so, Christ added to the former clause, which was level with Pilate's apprehension, the full explanation of the unusual term, as a kind of satisfaction to His own consciousness, rather than for any enlightenment that it would bring to its original hearer, and because He could not, even for a moment, adopt only language which might carry to some ears the inference that His birth was His beginning, or was as the birth of other men.

Now, brethren, I do not think that I am exaggerating anything in my interpretation of these three sayings, and therefore I make bold to say that when the Apostle Paul, in his intensely doctrinal fashion, talks about Jesus Christ being in the form of God, and not considering equality with God, as a thing to be eagerly grasped at, but emptying Himself, and being in the form of a servant; and found in fashion as a man; or when

the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews says, "Forasmuch as the children were partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same"; or when John says "the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us," they are saying nothing more than Jesus Christ has said about Himself. "Back to Christ!" Yes! by all means; and back to the Christ who declared that He was before He was born; that He left the eternal, Divine glory by His own act; that by His own volition He entered into the limitations of humanity, "and was not ashamed"—why should *a man* be?—to be called our brother.

So much, then, for the first of the lessons to be gathered from these great sayings. Let me, just in a sentence, refer to another. We find in these sayings clear indications of the world-wide significance which, in Christ's consciousness, attached to Himself and His work. I do not need to quote many of them. There are only two with which I will trouble you: one in which He says, "I am the Light of *the world*, that whosoever believeth in Me might not abide in darkness"; and the other, in which He says, "I came not to judge the *world*, but to save the *world*." In His earthly career He recognised His limitation as being "not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." And yet His love and His prescient eye went out from the very beginning, as the synagogue in Nazareth witnesses, to the "other sheep which are not of this fold"; to the lepers and the widows outside of Israel, and the whole race of mankind.

Think, think! "the Carpenter's Son," with no name, with no culture, with no material force, in that little

village hidden away amongst the hills in green Galilee, standing up there, in that humble synagogue and saying, "My mission is to humanity." And think how nineteen centuries have vindicated what seemed an idle boast.

II. But, secondly, I find in these sayings collectively our Lord's conception of the purposes of His coming.

I gather them together as briefly as may be. "The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which is lost." "The Son of Man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them." "I am come, not to judge the world, but to save the world." Salvation, then, is the purpose. Take another class. "I am come that they might have life." "The bread of God is He which cometh down from heaven that He may give life to the world." Salvation, then, or the communication of life, are the purposes. Yet again, "I am come, a Light into the world, that whosoever believeth in Me may not abide in darkness." Salvation, then, or the communication of life, or the flooding of the world with light, are the purposes, as Jesus saw them, of His coming.

Think of the conception of humanity, that is, of you and me, and of my needs and yours, which underlies these great words, dead; in peril; famished; dark and blind—that is humanity, as it presented itself before the meek Sage of Nazareth. And to deal with a humanity so full of desperate needs, and so utterly incapable of any kind of self-help, was the problem which this audacious young Rabbi grappled, and said He had solved. That is tremendous. And not only is it tremendous, but it may come to us with a suggestion that we had better see whether the terms in which

He described the world have any application to us, and, if so, what we mean to do. Christ looked below the surface. He regarded men mainly in their relation to God, and God's laws, and He beheld a universal pall spread over all nations, and every man as having come short of the glory of God.

Think, again, how in this declaration of purpose there lies the clearest consciousness of non-participation in that universal condition. He who comes and arrogates to himself the power and the right to deal with these necessities must himself be clear from all implication in them. Think of the consciousness of inexhaustible power, as well as the outgoing motion of a boundless love, which such a notion of His life's work proves Christ to have possessed. What a superb confidence in the healing power of His touch, in the exuberant abundance of vitality, by which He was able to breathe a soul beneath the ribs of all the corpses in the valley of dry bones! What an unfailing fountain of light there must have been in His own consciousness of Himself, that He should venture upon such words as these!

And, again, I say, His tremendous claim to be able to save the world in the full sense of delivering from all moral and physical evil, and endowing with all moral and physical good, is verified by facts. He has done it for some of us; He is doing it every day; and if He does not do it to the world, it is not because He has not the power, but because they will not submit to the power.

Did Peter, or John, or Paul ever say more about His work than He said Himself? Are not their most

rapturous sayings only the expansion and the setting forth of the ground and the consequences of His own statements? "Back to Christ," the Saviour, the Life-giver, and the Light-bringer.

III. Note, from these collective sayings, our Lord's conception of the manner in which the purpose of His life was to be discharged.

Again I summarise. "The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many." "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." "To this end came I into the world, to bear witness to the truth." "I am come to send fire on earth." Now observe that these three last statements of the manner in which He discharges His work—viz., calling sinners to repentance, bearing witness to the truth, and sending fire on earth, are subordinate to the great purpose which was stated in the first of the passages quoted, "the Son of Man is come . . . to give His life a ransom for many." The calling of sinners to repentance, and the bearing witness to the truth, fall mainly under the ministering which He did upon earth. Sending fire on earth is, as His own words abundantly show, only possible as the result of His giving His life a ransom for many. And so we have to regard the manner of His effecting His purpose as falling into two great portions, whereof the one covers the earthly life of ministration, with all the gentle words that drew publicans and harlots, and melted susceptible souls into a passion and a flood of repentance that needed not to be repented of, and with its witness to the truth by all the gracious words that came from His lips, and

most chiefly by the witness of His life, which declared God to men, and revealed men to themselves.

But, side by side with that ministration by life, separable from it, and the shining apex of the great pyramid that was raised day by day, and deed by deed, stands His death as the "ransom for many." Brethren, conceptions of Christ's manner of saving the world which put all the emphasis on His witnessing to the truth, or on His gracious ministrations, or even upon His calling sinners to repentance, are truncated and incomplete; and, on the other hand, all these other forms of His activity are most fully operative in His death as our ransom on the cross. For I would fain know what, in all the gentle beauty of His earthly life, has moulded and drawn hearts to self-abasement and a hearty hatred of, and turning from, their sins, like the pathos and the power of that death; and what, in all the gracious words that proceeded out of His mouth, and in all the deeds of beauty with which He wrought for us the living example of duty, has so borne witness to the truth, as that same death. And what is it that kindled the fire of that swift spirit, poured out upon the world's icy coldness, but the sacrifice which must needs precede it?

Therefore, unless we take the ransom as the chief part of the manner by which He saves the world, we do not go "back to Christ," nor accept His own estimate of Himself. If we do so accept, we must listen to Him saying, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up;" "The bread which I will give is My flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."

IV. Lastly, I find in these collective sayings our Lord's prevision of the issue of His work.

"Think not that I am come to send peace on earth. I am come, not to send peace, but a sword"; or, as another evangelist has it less picturesquely, in the parallel passage, "not peace, but rather division." Again, His epilogue to the great story of the blind man who was made to see, and was then cast out by the blind men that would not see, is, "for judgment am I come into the world, that they which see not might see, and that they which see might be made blind."

Jesus was under no illusions as to the issue of His work. Purpose is one thing; result is altogether another. The mission had but one intention, but it has a two-fold consequence; because man's freewill comes in, and even infinite Love could not ensure that all men should accept the ransom from captivity, or all should be enkindled by the leaping fire of the Divine Spirit. "How often would I have gathered thy children together as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" That is the wail of thwarted Omnipotence; the tears of blood dropped by wounded, infinite Love. All through the ages the same issue is being realised; and it is being realised here to-night. "Some believed the word that was spoken, and some believed not." Thus the aged Simeon's prophetic vision is fulfilled: "This Child is set for the rise and fall of many in Israel." Though the mission has one purpose it has a double result.

So let me urge on you, dear friends, to take Christ's words, and to take them all. There is no warrant for the common practice of picking and choosing

amongst them, and rejecting one of two sayings which come to us attested by precisely the same evidence, while we accept the other, on the ground that the one fits our notions and the other does not. "All in all, or not at all," should be our principle in dealing with the words of the Incarnate Truth.

As clearly as tongue can speak, He has asserted that He "came forth from God, and came into the world." That is the foundation of the Apostolic doctrine of the Incarnation. As clearly as tongue can speak, He has asserted that the purpose of His coming is to save the lost, to vivify the dead, to give light to them that sit in darkness. That is the foundation of the Apostolic doctrine of man's sin and danger. As clearly as tongue can speak He has declared that the manner of His accomplishing His purpose is "to minister," to bear witness to the "truth," "to call sinners to repentance, to give His life a ransom for many." That is the foundation of the Apostolic doctrine of the Atonement. As clearly as tongue can speak He has asserted that after His cross He will flood the world with fire. That is the foundation of the Apostolic doctrine of an indwelling Spirit. As clearly as tongue can speak He has asserted that sight or blindness, life or death, depends on the reception or rejection of His words. That is the foundation of the Apostolic doctrine of the tremendous issues of salvation or of loss which hang on our listening to Him, or our turning from Him.

And it is the reason why I venture, dear brethren, to come to you to-night, and as Christ's unworthy ambassador, beseech you in His stead that you listen to Him.

God Himself has spoken from heaven: "This is My beloved Son; hear Him." "See that ye refuse not Him that speaketh" to us still; "for if they escaped not who turned away from Him that spake on earth, much more shall we not escape if we turn away from Him that" now "speaketh from heaven."

THE UNITY OF APOSTOLIC TEACHING.

"Whether it were I or they, so we preach, and so ye believed."—1 Cor. xv. 11.

PARTY spirit and faction were the curses of Greek civic life, and they had crept into at least one of the Greek churches: that in the luxurious and powerful city of Corinth. We know that there was a very considerable body of antagonists to Paul, who ranked themselves under the banner of Apollos or of Cephas—*i.e.*, Peter. Therefore, Paul, keenly conscious that he was speaking to some unfriendly critics, hastens in the context to remove the possible objection which might be made that the Gospel which he preached was peculiar to himself, and proceeds to assert that the whole substance of what he had to say to men was held with unbroken unanimity by the other apostles. "They" means all of *them*; and "so" means the summary of the Gospel teaching in the preceding verses.

Now, Paul would not have ventured to make that assertion in the face of men whom he knew to be eager to pick holes in anything that he said, unless he had been perfectly sure of his ground. There were broad differences between him and the others. But their partisans might squabble, as is often the case, and the men, whose partisans they were, be unanimous. There were differences of individual character, of temper, and

of views about certain points of Christian truth. But there was an unbroken front of unanimity in regard of all that lies within the compass of that little word which covers so much ground: "*So* we preach."

Now, I wish to turn to that outstanding fact—which does not always attract the attention which it deserves—of the absolute identity of the message which all the apostles and primitive teachers delivered, and to seek to enforce some of the considerations and lessons which seem to me naturally to flow from it.

I. First, then, I ask you to think of the fact itself—the unbroken unanimity of the whole body of Apostolic teachers.

As I have said, there were wide differences of characteristics between them, but there was a broad tract of teaching wherein they all agreed. Let me briefly gather up the points of unanimity, the contents of the one Gospel which every man of them felt was his message to the world. I may take it all from the two clauses in the preceding context, "how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures." These are the things about which, as Paul declares, there was not a whisper of a dissentient voice. There is the vital centre which he declares every Christian teacher grasped as being the essential of his message: and in various tones and manners, but in substantial identity of content, declared to the world.

Now, what lies in it? The Person spoken of—the Christ, and all that that word involves of reference to the ancient and incomplete Revelation in the past, its shadows and types, its prophecies and ceremonies, its

priesthood and its sacrifices; with all that it involves of reference to the ancient hopes on which a thousand generations had lived, and which either are baseless delusions or are realised in Jesus—the Person whom all the Apostles proclaimed was One anointed from God as Prophet, Priest, and King; who had come into the world to fulfil all that the ancient system had shadowed by sacrifice, temple, and priest, the Monarch of Israel and of the world.

And not only were they absolutely unanimous in regard to the Person, but they were unbrokenly consentient in regard to the facts of His life, His death, and His resurrection. But the proclamation of the external fact is no gospel. You must add the clause "for our sins," and then the record, which is a mere piece of history, with no more good news in it than the record of the death of any other martyr, hero, or saint starts into being truly the good news for the world. The least part of a historical fact is the fact; the greatest part of it is the explanation of the fact, and the setting it in its place in regard to other facts, the exhibition of the principles which it expresses, and of the conclusions to which it leads. So the bare historical declaration of a death and a resurrection is transmuted into a gospel, by that which is the most important part of the Gospel, the explanation of the meaning of the fact—"He died for our sins."

If redemption from sin through the death of a person is the fundamental conception of the Gospel for the world, then it is clear that for such a purpose a Divine nature in the person is wanted. Your notion of what Christ came to do will determine your notion of who

He is. If you only recognise that His work is to teach or to show in exercise a fair human character, then you may rest content with the lower notion of His nature, which sees in Him but the foremost of the sons of men. But if we grasp "died for our sins," then for such a task the incarnation of the Eternal Son of God is the absolute pre-requisite.

Still further, our text brings out the contents of this gospel as being the declaration of the resurrection. On that I need not here and now dwell at any length. But these are the points, the person, the two facts, death and resurrection, and the great meaning of the death—viz., the expiation for the world's sins: these are the things on which the whole of the primitive teachers of the Apostolic Church had one voice and one message.

Now, I do not suppose that I need spend any time in showing to you how the extant records bear out absolutely this contention of the Apostle's. I need only remind you how the opposition that was waged against him—and it was a very vigorous and a very bitter opposition—from a section of the Church had no bearing at all upon the question of what he taught, but only upon the question of to whom it was to be taught. The only objection that the so-called Judaising party in the early Church had against Paul and his preaching was not the Gospel that he declared, but his assertion that the Gentile nations might enter into the Church through faith in Jesus Christ, without passing through the gate of circumcision. Depend upon it, if there had been any, even the most microscopic, divergence on his part from the general, broad stream of Christian teaching, the

sleepless, keen-eyed, unscrupulous enemies that dogged him all his days would have pounced upon it eagerly, and would never have ceased talking about it. But not one of them ever said a word of the sort, but allowed his teaching to pass, because it was the teaching of every one of the apostles.

If I had time, or if it were necessary, it would be easy to point you to the records that we have left of the Apostolic teaching, in order to confirm this unbroken unanimity. I do not need to spend time on that. Proof-texts are not worth so much as the fact that these doctrines are interwoven into the whole structure of the New Testament as a whole—just as they are into Paul's letters. But I may gather one or two sayings in which the substance of each writer's teaching has been concentrated by himself. For instance, Peter speaks about being "redeemed by the precious blood of Christ as a Lamb without blemish and without spot," and declares that "He Himself bare our sins in His own body on the tree." John comes in with his doxology: "Unto Him that loved us and loosed us from our sins in His own blood"; and it is his pen that records how in the heavens there echoed "glory and honour and thanks and blessing, for ever and ever, to the Lamb that was slain, and has redeemed us unto God by His blood." The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, steeped as he is in ceremonial and sacrificial ideas, and having for his one purpose to work out the thought that Jesus Christ is all that the ancient ritual, sacerdotal, and sacrificial system shadows and foretells, sums up his teaching in the statement that Christ having come, a high priest of good things to come, "through His own blood, entered

in once for all into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us."

There were limits to the unanimity, as I have already said. Paul and Peter had a great quarrel about circumcision and related subjects. The Apostolic writings are wondrously diverse from one another. Peter is far less constructive and profound than Paul. Paul and Peter are both untouched with the mystic wisdom of the Apostle John. But, in regard to the facts that I have signalised, the divinity, the person of Jesus Christ, His death and resurrection, and the significance to be attached to that death, they are absolutely one. The instruments in the orchestra are various, the tender flute, the ringing trumpet, and many another, but the note they strike is the same. "Whether it were I or they, so we preach."

II. Now, let me ask you to consider the only explanation of this unanimity.

Time was when the people who did not believe in Christ's divinity and sacrificial death tortured themselves to try and make out meanings for these epistles, which should not include the obnoxious doctrines. That is nearly antiquated. I suppose that there is nobody now, or next to nobody, that does not admit that, right or wrong, Paul, Peter, John—all of them—teach these two things, that Christ is the Eternal Son of the Father, and that His death is the sacrifice for the world's sin. But they say that that is not the primitive, simple teaching of the Man of Nazareth; and that the unanimity is a unanimity of misapprehension of, and addition to, His words and to the drift of His teaching.

Now, just think what a huge—I was going to say—

inconceivability that supposition is. For there is no point, say from the time at which the Apostle who wrote the words of my text, which was somewhere about the year 56 or 57 A.D.,—there is no point between that period, working backwards through the history of the Church to the Crucifixion, where you can insert such a tremendous revolution of teaching as this. There is no trace of such a change. Peter's earliest speeches as recorded in Acts are in some important respects less developed doctrinally than are the epistles, but Christ's Messiahship, death and resurrection, with which is connected the remission of sins, are as clearly and emphatically proclaimed as at any later time. So these points of the Apostolic testimony were preached from the first, and if in preaching them, the witnesses perverted the simple teaching of the carpenter of Nazareth, and ascribed to Him a character which He had not claimed, and to His death a power of which He had not dreamed, they did so at the very time when the impressions of His personality and teaching were most recent and strong. It seems to me, apart altogether from other considerations, that such a right-about-face movement on the part of the early teachers of Christianity is an absolute impossibility, regard being had to the facts of the case, even if you make much allowance for possible errors in the record.

But I would make another remark. If misapprehension came in, if these men, in their unanimous declaration of Christ's death as the sacrifice for sin, were not fairly representing the conclusions inevitable from the facts of Christ's life and death and from His own words, is it not an odd thing that the same misapprehension affected them

all? When people misconceive a teacher's doctrine, they generally differ in the nature of their misconceptions, and split into sections and parties. But here you have to account for the fact that every man of them, with all their diversity of idiosyncrasy and character, tumbled into the same pit of error, and that there was not one of them left sane enough to protest. Does that seem to be a likely thing?

And what about the worth of the teacher's teaching, that did not guard its receivers from such absolute misapprehension as that? If the whole Church unanimously mistook everything that Jesus Christ had said to them, and unwarrantably made out of Him what they did, on this hypothesis, I do not think that there is much left to honour or admire in a teacher whose teaching was so ambiguous as that it led all that received it into such an error as that into which, by the supposition, they fell.

No, brethren; they were one, because their Gospel was the only possible statement of the principles that underlay, and the conclusions that flowed from, the plain facts of the life and the teaching of Jesus Christ. I am not going to spend time in quoting His own words. I can only refer to one or two of them very succinctly. "Destroy this Temple, and in three days I will raise it up." "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up." "My flesh is the bread which I will give for the life of the world." "The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many." "This is My body broken for you; take, eat, in remembrance of Me." "This is My blood, shed for many for the remission of sins; this do ye, as often as ye drink it, in

remembrance of Me." What possible explanation, doing justice to these words, is there, except "Jesus Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures"? And how could men who had heard them with their own ears, and with their own eyes had seen Him risen from the dead and ascending into heaven, do otherwise than eagerly, enthusiastically, at the cost of all, and with unhesitating voice of unbroken unanimity, "so preach."

I quite admit that in Christ's teaching in the gospels you will not find the articulate drawing out into doctrinal statement of the principles that underlay, and the conclusions that flow from, the historical fact of Christ's propitiatory death. I do not wonder at that, nor do I admit that it is any argument against the truth of the Divine revelation which is made in these doctrinal statements, to allege that we find nothing corresponding to them in Jesus Christ's own words. The silence is not as absolute as is alleged, as the quotations which I have made, and which might have been multiplied, do distinctly enough show. Even if it were more absolute than it is, the silence is by no means unintelligible. Christ had to offer the Sacrifice before the Sacrifice could be preached. He Himself warned His disciples against accepting His own words prior to the Cross, as the conclusive and ultimate revelation. "I have many things to say unto you, but you cannot carry them now." There was need that the Cross should be a fact before it was evolved into a doctrine. And so I venture to say that the unanimity of the preaching is only explicable on the ground of that preaching in both its parts—its assertion of Jesus' Messiahship and of His propitiatory death—being the repetition on the house-

top of the lessons which they had heard in the ear from Him.

III. Note, briefly, the lesson from this unanimity.

Let us distinctly apprehend where is the living heart of the Gospel—that it is the message of redemption by the incarnation and sacrifice of the Son of God. There follows from that incarnation and sacrifice all the great teaching about the work of the Divine Spirit in men dwelling in them for evermore. But the beginning of all is, "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures." And, brethren, that message meets, as nothing else meets, the deepest needs of every human soul. It is able, as nothing else is able, to open out into a whole encyclopædia and universe of wisdom and truth and power. If we strike it out of our conception of Christianity, or if we obscure it as being the very palpitating centre of the whole, then feebleness will creep over the Christianity that is *minus* a Cross, or does not see on it the sacrifice for the world's sin. You may cast overboard the sails to lighten the ship. If you do she lies a log on the waters. And if, for the sake of meeting new phases of thought, Christian churches tamper with this central truth, they have flung away their means of progress and of power.

Let me say again, and in a word only, that the considerations that I have been trying to submit to you in this sermon show us the limits within which the modern cry of "Back to the Christ of the Gospels," is right, and where it may be wrong. I believe that in former days, and to some extent in the present day, we evangelical teachers have too much sometimes talked rather about the doctrines than about the Person who is

the doctrines. And if the cry of "Back to the Christ" means, Do not talk so much about the Atonement and Propitiation; talk about the Christ who atones, then, with all my heart, I say, Amen! But put the Person in the foreground; the living-loving, the dying-loving, the risen-loving Christ, put Him in the foreground. But if it is implied, as I am afraid it is often implied, that the Christ of the gospels is one and the Christ of the epistles is another, and that to go back to the Christ of the gospels means to drop "died for our sins according to the Scriptures," and to retain only the non-miraculous, moral and religious teachings that are recorded in the three first gospels, then I say that it is fatal for the Church, and it is false to the facts, for the Christ of the epistles is the Christ of the gospels: the difference only being that in the one you have the facts, and in the other you have their meaning and their power.

So, lastly, let this text teach us what we ourselves have to do with this unanimous testimony. "So we preach, and so ye believed."

Brother! Do you believe *so?* That is to say, is your conception of the Gospel the mighty redemptive agency which is wrought by the Incarnate Son of God, who was crucified for our offences, and rose that we might live, and is glorified that we, too, may share His glory? Is that your Gospel? But do not be content with an intellectual grasp of the thing. "So ye believed" means a great deal more than "I believe that Christ died for our sins." It means "I believe *in* the Christ who did die for my sins." You must cast youself as a sinful man on Him; and, so casting,

you will find that it is no vain story which is commended to us by all these august voices from the past, but you will have in your own experience the verification of the fact that He died for our sins, in your own consciousness of sins forgiven, and new love bestowed; and so may turn round to Paul, the leader of the chorus, and to all the Apostolic band, and say to them, "Now I believe, not because of thy saying, but because I have seen Him, and myself heard Him."

THE THREE TRIBUNALS.

"With me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment; yea, I judge not mine own self. For I know nothing against myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but He that judgeth me is the Lord."—1 Cor. iv. 3, 4.

THE Church at Corinth was honeycombed by the characteristic Greek vice of party spirit. The three great teachers, Paul, Peter, Apollos, were pitted against each other, and each was unduly exalted by those who swore by him, and unduly depreciated by the other two factions. But the men whose names were the war-cries of these sections were themselves knit in closest friendship, and felt themselves to be servants in common of one Master, and fellow-workers in one task.

So Paul, in the immediate context, associating Peter and Apollos with himself, bids the Corinthians think of "*us*" as being servants of Christ, and not therefore responsible to men; and as stewards of the mysteries of God, that is, dispensers of truths long hidden but now revealed, and as therefore accountable for correct accounts and faithful dispensation only to the Lord of the household. Being responsible to Him, they heeded very little what others thought about them. Being responsible to Him, they could not accept vindication by their own consciences as being final. There was a judgment beyond these.

So here we have three tribunals, that of man's estimates, that of our own consciences, that of Jesus Christ. An appeal lies from the first to the second, and from the second to the third. It is base to depend on men's judgments; it is well to attend to the decisions of conscience, but it is not well to take it for granted that, if conscience approve, we are absolved. The court of final appeal is Jesus Christ, and what He thinks about each of us. So let us look briefly at these three tribunals.

I. First, the lowest—men's judgment.

"With me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you," enlightened Christians that you are; or by the outside world. Now, Paul's letters give ample evidence that he was keenly alive to the hostile and malevolent criticisms and slanders of his untiring opponents. Many a flash of sarcasm out of the cloud like a lightning bolt, many a burst of wounded affection like rain from summer skies, tell us this. But I need not quote these. Such a character as his could not but be quick to feel the surrounding atmosphere, whether it was of love or of suspicion. So, he had to harden himself against what naturally had a great effect upon him, the estimate which he felt that people round him were making of him. There was nothing brusque, rough, contemptuous in his brushing aside these popular judgments. He gave them all due weight, and yet he felt, "from all that this lowest tribunal may decide, there are two appeals, one to my own conscience, and one to my Master in heaven."

Now, I suppose I need not say a word about the power which that terrible court which is always sitting, and which passes judgment upon every one of us, though

we do not always hear the sentences read, has upon us all. There is a power which it is meant to have. It is not good for a man to stand constantly in the attitude of defying whatever anybody else chooses to say or to think about him. But the danger to which we are all exposed, far more than that other extreme, is of deferring too completely and slavishly to, and being far too subtly influenced in all that we do by, the thought of what A, B, or C may have to say or to think about it. "The last infirmity of noble minds," says Milton about the love of fame. It is an infirmity to love it, and long for it, and live by it. It is a weakening of humanity, even where men are spurred to great efforts by the thought of the reverberation of those in the ear of the world, and of the honour and glory that may come therefrom.

But not only in these higher forms of seeking after reputation, but in lower forms, this trembling before, and seeking to conciliate, the tribunal of what we call "general opinion," which means the voices of the half-dozen people that are beside us, and know about us, besets us all, and weakens us all in a thousand ways. How many men would lose all the motive that they have for living reputable lives, if nobody knew anything about it? How many of you, when you go to London, and are strangers, frequent places that you would not be seen in in Manchester? How many of us are hindered, in courses that we know we ought to pursue, because we are afraid of this or that man or woman, and of what they may look or speak. There is a regard to man's judgment, which is separated by the very thinnest partition from hypocrisy. There is a very shadowy distinction between the man who, consciously or uncon-

sciously, does a thing with an eye to what people may say about it, and the man who pretends to be what he is not, for the sake of the reputation that he may thereby win.

Now, the direct tendency of Christian faith and principle is to dwindle into wholesome insignificance the multitudinous voice of men's judgments. For, if I understand what Christianity means at all, it means, centrally and essentially this, that I am brought into loving personal relation with Jesus Christ, and draw from Him the power of my life, and from Him the law of my life, and from Him the stimulus of my life, and from Him the reward of my life. If there is a direct communication between me and Him, and if I am deriving from Him the life that He gives, which is free from the law of sin and death, I shall have little need or desire to heed the judgment that men who see only the surface may pass upon me, and upon my doings; and I shall refer myself to Him instead of to them. Those who can go straight to Christ, whose lives are steeped in Him, who feel that they draw all from Him, and that their actions and character are moulded by His touch and His spirit, are responsible to no other tribunal. And the less they think about what men have to say of them the stronger, the nobler, the more Christ-like they will be.

There is no need for any contempt or roughness to blend with such a putting aside of men's judgments. The velvet glove may be worn upon the iron hand. All meekness and lowliness may go with this wholesome independence, and it must go with it unless that independence is false and distorted. "With me it is a very small thing to be judged of you, or of man's judg-

ment," need not be said in such a tone as to mean "I do not care a rush what you think about me"; but it must be said in such a tone as to mean "I care supremely for one approbation, and if I have that I can bear anything besides."

Let me appeal to you to cultivate more distinctly, as a plain Christian duty, this wholesome independence of men's judgment. I suppose there never was a day when it was more needed that men should be themselves, seeing with their own eyes what God may reveal to them and they are capable of receiving, and walking with their own feet on the path that fits them, whatsoever other people may say about it. For the multiplication of daily literature, the way in which we are all living in glass houses nowadays—everybody knowing everything about everybody else, and delighting in the gossip which takes the place of literature in so many quarters—and the tendency of society to a more democratic form give the many-headed monster and its many tongues far more power than is wholesome, in the shaping of the lives and character and conduct of most men. The evil of democracy is that it levels down all to one plane, and that it tends to turn out millions of people, as like each other as if they had been made in a machine. And so we need, I believe, even more than our fathers did, to lay to heart this lesson, that the direct result of a deep and strong Christian faith is the production of intensely individual character. And if there are plenty of angles in it, perhaps so much the better. We are apt to be rounded by being rubbed against each other, like the stones on the beach, till there is not a sharp corner or a point that can prick anywhere.

So society becomes utterly monotonous, and is insipid and profitless because of that. You Christian people, be yourselves, after your own pattern. And whilst you accept all help from surrounding suggestions and hints, make it "a very small thing that you be judged of men." And you, young men, in warehouses and shops, and you, students, and you, boys and girls, that are budding into life, never mind what other people say. "Let thine eyes look right onwards," and let all the clatter on either side of you go on as it will. The voices are very loud, but if we go up high enough, on the hill-top, to the secret place of the Most High, we shall look down and see, but not hear, the bustle and the buzz; and in the great silence Christ will whisper to us, "Well done! good and faithful servant." That praise is worth getting, and one way to get it is to put aside the hindrance of anxious seeking to conciliate the good opinion of men.

II. Note the higher court of conscience.

Our Apostle is not to be taken here as contradicting what he says in other places. "I judge not mine own self,"—yet in one of these same letters to the Corinthians he says, "If we judged ourselves we should not be judged." So that he does not mean here that he is entirely without any estimate of his own character or actions. That he did in some sense judge himself is evident from the next clause, because he goes on to say, "I know nothing against myself." If he acquitted himself, he must previously have been judging himself. But his acquittal of himself is not to be understood as if it covered the whole ground of his life and character, but it is to be confined to the subject in hand—viz., his

faithfulness as a steward of the mysteries of God. But though there is nothing in that region of his life which he can charge against himself as unfaithfulness, he goes on to say, "Yet am I not hereby justified?"

The absolving by conscience is not infallible. I fancy that conscience is more reliable when it condemns than when it acquits. It is never safe for a man to neglect it when it says, "You are wrong!" It is just as unsafe for a man to accept it, without further investigation, when it says, "You are right!" For the only thing that is infallible about what we call conscience is its sentence, "It is right to do right." But when it proceeds to say "this, that, and the other thing is right; and therefore it is right for you to do it," there may be errors in the judgment, as everybody's own experience tells them. The inward judge needs to be stimulated, to be enlightened, to be corrected often. I suppose that the growth of Christian character is very largely the discovery that things that we thought innocent are not for us so innocent as we thought them.

You only need to go back to history, or to go down into your own histories, to see how, as light has increased, dark corners have been revealed that were invisible in the less brilliant illumination. How long it has taken the Christian Church to find out what Christ's Gospel teaches about slavery, about the relations of sex, about drunkenness, about war, about a hundred other things that you and I do not yet know, but which our successors will wonder that we failed to see! Inquisitor and martyr have equally said, "We are serving God." Surely, too, nothing is more clearly witnessed by individual experience, than that we may do a wrong thing, and

think that it is right. "They that kill you will think that they do God service."

So, Christian people, accept the inward monition when it is stern and prohibitive. Do not be too sure about it when it is placable and permissive. "Happy is he that condemneth not himself in the thing which he alloweth." There may be secret faults, lying all unseen beneath the undergrowth in the forest, which yet do prick and sting. The upper floors of the house where we receive company, and where we, the tenants, generally live, may be luxurious, and sweet and clean. What about the cellars, where ugly things crawl and swarm, and breed and sting?

Ah! dear brethren, when my conscience says to me, "You may do it," it is always well to go to Jesus Christ, and say to Him "May I?" "Search me, O God, and . . . see if there be any wicked way in me," and show it to me, and help me to cast it out. "I know nothing against myself; yet am I not hereby justified."

III. Lastly, note the supreme court of final appeal.

"He that judgeth me is the Lord." Now, it is obvious that "the Lord" here is Christ, both because of the preceding context, and because of the next verse, which speaks of His coming. And it is equally obvious, though it is often unnoticed, that the judgment of which the Apostle is here speaking is a present and preliminary judgment. "He that *judgeth* me"—not, "will judge," but *now*, at this very moment. That is to say, whilst people round us are passing their superficial estimates upon us, and whilst my conscience is excusing, or else accusing me—and in neither case with absolute infallibility—there is another judgment, running concurrently with them, and going on in silence. That calm eye is

fixed upon me, and sifting me, and knowing me. *That* judgment is not fallible, because before Him "the hidden things" that the darkness shelters, those creeping things in the cellars that I was speaking about, are all manifest; and to Him the "counsels of the heart," that is, the motives from which the actions flow, are all transparent and legible. So His judgment, the continual estimate of me which Jesus Christ, in His supreme knowledge of me, has, at every moment of my life—*that* is uttering the final word about me and my character.

The estimate will dwindle the sentences of the other two tribunals into nothingness. What matter what his fellow-servants say about the steward's accounts, and distribution of provisions, and management of the household? He has to render his books, and to give account of his stewardship, only to his lord.

The governor of a Crown Colony may attach some importance to colonial opinion, but he reports home; and it is what the people in Downing Street will say that he thinks about. We have to report home; and it is the King whom we serve, to whom we have to give an account.

The gladiator, down in the arena, did not much mind whether the thumbs of the populace were up or down, though the one was the signal for his life and the other for his death. He looked to the place where, between the purple curtains and the flashing axes of the lictors, the emperor sate. Our Emperor once was down in the sand Himself. And although we are "compassed about with a cloud of witnesses," we look to the Christ, the supreme Arbiter, and take acquittal or condemnation, life or death, from Him.

That judgment, persistent all through each of our lives, is preliminary to the future tribunal and sentence. The Apostle employs in this context two distinct words, both of which are translated in our version "judge." The one which is used in these three clauses, on which I have been commenting, means a preliminary examination, and the one which is used in the next verse means a final decisive trial and sentence. So, dear brethren, Christ is gathering materials for His final sentence; and you and I are writing the depositions which will be adduced in evidence. Oh! how little all that the world may have said about a man will matter then. Think of a man standing before that great white Throne, and saying, "I held a very high place in the estimation of my neighbours. The newspapers and the reviews blew my trumpet assiduously. My name was carved upon the plinth of a marble statue, that my fellow-citizens set up in honour of my many virtues." And the name was illegible centuries before the statue was burned in the last fire!

Brother! seek for the praise from Him, which is praise indeed. If He says, "Well done, good and faithful servant," it matters little what censures men may pass on us. If He says "I never knew you," all their praises will not avail. "Wherefore we labour that, whether present or absent, we may be well-pleasing to Him."

WHAT LASTS.

"Whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. . . . And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three. . . ."—1 Cor. xiii. 8, 13.

WE discern the run of the Apostle's thought best by thus omitting the intervening verses and connecting these two. The part omitted is but a buttress of what has been stated in the former of our two verses; and when we thus unite them there is disclosed plainly the Apostle's intention of contrasting two sets of things, three in each. The one set is prophecies, tongues, knowledge; the other, faith, hope, charity. There also comes out distinctly that the point mainly intended by the contrast is the transiency of the one and the permanence of the other. Now, that contrast has been obscured and weakened by two mistakes, about which I must say a word.

With regard to the former statement, "whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease," that has been misunderstood as if it amounted to a declaration that the miraculous gifts in the early Church were intended to be of brief duration. However true that may be, it is not what Paul means here. The cessation to which he refers is their cessation, in the light of the perfect future. With regard to the

other statement, the abiding of faith, hope, charity, that, too, has been misapprehended as if it indicated that faith and hope belonged to this state of things only, and that love was the greatest of the three, because it was permanent. The reason for that misconception has mainly lain in the misunderstanding of the force of "*Now*," which has been taken to mean "for the present," as an implied contrast to an unspoken "then"; just as in the previous verse we have, "*Now* we see through a glass, *then* face to face." But the "now" in this text is not, as the grammarians say, temporal, but logical. That is, it does not refer to time, but to the sequence of the Apostle's thought, and is equivalent to "so then." "So then abideth faith, hope, charity."

The scope of the whole, then, is to contrast the transient with the permanent, in Christian experience. If we firmly grasped the truth involved, our estimates would be rectified and our practice revolutionised.

I. I ask this question: What will drop away?

Paul answers, "prophecies, tongues, knowledge." Now these three are all extraordinary gifts belonging to the present phase of the Christian life. But inasmuch as these gifts were the heightening of natural capacities and faculties, it is perfectly legitimate to enlarge the declaration and to use these three words in their widest signification. So understood, they come to this, that all our present modes of apprehension and of utterance are transient, and will be left behind.

"Knowledge, it shall cease," and as the Apostle goes on to explain, in the verses which I have passed over for my present purpose, it shall cease because the perfect will absorb into itself the imperfect, as the inrushing tide

will obliterate the little pools in the rocks on the sea-shore. For another reason, the knowledge, the mode of apprehension belonging to the present, will pass—because here it is indirect, and there it will be immediate. "We shall know face to face," which is what philosophers call by intuition. Here our "knowledge creeps from point to point," painfully amassing facts, and thence, with many hesitations and errors, groping its way towards principles and laws. Here it is imperfect, with many a gap in the circumference; or like the thin red line on a map which shows the traveller's route across a prairie, or like the spider's thread in the telescope, stretched athwart the blazing disc of the sun—"but then face to face." Incomplete knowledge shall be done away; and many of its objects will drop, and much of what makes the science of earth will be antiquated and effete. What would the handloom weaver's knowledge of how to throw his shuttle be worth in a weaving-shed with a thousand looms? Just so much will the knowledges of earth be when we get yonder.

Modes of utterance will cease. With new experiences will come new methods of communication; as a man can speak, and a beast can only growl or bark. So a man in heaven, with new experiences, will have new methods of communication. The comparison between that mode of utterance which we now have, and that which we shall then possess, will be like the difference between the old-fashioned semaphore, that used to wave about clumsy wooden arms in order to convey intelligence, and the telegraph.

Think, then, of a man going into that future life, and saying "I knew more about Sanscrit than anybody that

ever lived in Europe"; "I sang sweet song"; "I was a past master in philology, grammars, and lexicons"; "I was a great orator." "Tongues shall cease"; and the modes of utterance that belonged to earth, and all that holds of them, will drop away, and be of no more use.

If these things are true, brethren, with regard even to the highest form of these high and noble things, how much more and more solemnly true are they with regard to the aims and objects which most of us have in view. They will all drop away, and we shall be left, stripped of what, for most of us, has made the whole interest and activity of our lives.

II. What will last?

"So then, abideth these three, faith, hope, love." When Paul takes three nouns and couples them with a verb in the singular, he is not making a slip of the pen, or committing a grammatical blunder which a child could correct. But there is a great truth in that piece of apparent grammatical irregularity; for the faith, the hope, and the love, for which he can only afford a singular verb, are thereby declared to be in their depth and essence one thing, and it, the triple star, abides, and continues to shine; the three primitive colours are unified in the white beam of light. Do not correct the grammar, and spoil the sense, but discern what he means when he says, "Now, abid*eth* faith, hope, love." For this is what he means, that the two latter come out of the former, and that without it they are nought, and that it without them is dead.

Faith breeds Hope. *There* is the difference between earthly hopes and Christian people's hopes. Our hopes, apart from the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, are

but the balancing of probabilities, and the scale is often dragged down by the clutch of eager desires. But all is baseless and uncertain, unless our hopes are the outcome of our faith. Which, being translated into other words, is just this, that the one basis on which men can rest—ay! even for the immediate future, and the contingencies of life, as well as for the solemnities and certainties of heaven—any legitimate and substantial hope is trust in Jesus Christ, His word, His love, His power, and for the heavenly future, in His Resurrection and present glory. A man that believes these things, and only that man, has a rock foundation on which he can build his hope.

Faith, in like manner, is the parent of Love. Paul and John, diverse as they are in the whole cast of their minds, the one being speculative and the other mystical, the one argumentative and the other simply gazing and telling what he sees, are precisely agreed in regard of this matter. For, to the Apostle of Love, the foundation of all human love towards God is, "we have known and believed the love that God hath to us," and "we love Him because He first loved us." And to Paul the first thing is the trusting reception of the love of God, "commended to us" by the fact that "whilst we were yet sinners Christ died for us." And from that necessarily flows, if the faith be genuine, the love that answers the sacrifice and obeys the Beloved. So faith, hope, love, these three are a trinity in unity, and it abideth. That is the main point of our last text. Let me say a word or two about it.

I have said that the words have often been misunderstood as if the "now," referred only to the present order

of things, in which faith and hope are supposed to find their only appropriate sphere. But that is clearly not the Apostle's meaning here, for many reasons with which I need not trouble you. The abiding of all three is eternal abiding, and there is a heavenly as well as an earthly form of faith and hope as well as of love. Just look at these points for a moment.

"Faith abides," says Paul, yonder, as here. Now, there is a common saying, which I suppose ninety out of a hundred people think comes out of the Bible, about faith being lost in sight. There is no such teaching in Scripture. True, in one aspect, faith is the antithesis of sight. True, Paul does say "we walk by faith, not by sight." But that antithesis refers only to part of faith's significance. In so far as it is the opposite of sight, of course it will cease to be in operation when "we shall know even as we are known," and "see Him as He is." But the essence of faith is not the absence of the person trusted, but the emotion of trust which goes out to the person, present or absent. And in its deepest meaning of absolute dependence and happy confidence, faith abides through all the glories, and the lustres of the heavens, as it burns amidst the dimnesses and the darknesses of earth. For ever and ever, on through the irrevoluble ages of eternity, dependence on God in Christ will be the life of the glorified, as it was the life of the militant, Church. No millenniums of possession, and no imaginable increases in beauty and perfectness and enrichment with the wealth of God, will bring us one inch nearer to casting off the state of filial dependence which is, and ever will be, the condition of our receiving them all. Faith "abides."

Hope "abides." For it is no more a Scriptural idea that hope is lost in fruition, than it is that faith is lost in sight. Rather that future presents itself to us as the continual communication of an inexhaustible God to our progressively capacious and capable spirits. In that continual communication there is continual progress. Wherever there is progress there must be hope. And thus the fair form, which has so often danced before us elusive, and has led us into bogs and miry places and then faded away, will move before us through all the long avenues of an endless progress, and will ever and anon come back to tell us of the unseen glories that lie beyond the next turn, and to woo us further into the depths of heaven and the fulness of God. Hope "abides."

Love "abides." I need not, I suppose, enlarge upon that thought which nobody denies, that love is the eternal form of the human relation to God. It, too, like the mercy which it clasps, "endureth for ever."

But I may remind you of what the Apostle does not explain in our text, that it is greater than its linked sisters, because whilst faith and hope belong only to a creature, and are dependent and expectant of some good to come to themselves, and correspond to something which is in God in Christ, the love which springs from faith and hope not only corresponds to, but resembles, that from which it comes and by which it lives. The fire kindled is cognate with the fire that kindles; and the love that is in man is like the love that is in God. It is the climax of his nature; it is the fulfilling of all duty; it is the crown and jewelled

clasp, of all perfection. And so "these three abideth faith, hope, love, and the greatest of these is love."

III. Lastly, what follows from all this?

First, let us be quite sure that we understand what this abiding love is. I daresay you have heard people say "Ah! I do not care much about Paul's theology. Give me the thirteenth chapter of the first Epistle to the Corinthians. That is beautiful; that praise of Love; *that* comes home to men." Yes, very beautiful. Are you quite sure that you know what Paul means by "love"? I do not use the word charity, because that lovely word, like a glistening meteor that falls upon the earth, has a rust, as it were, upon its surface that dims its brightness very quickly. Charity has come to mean an indulgent estimate of other people's faults; or, still more degradingly, the giving of money out of your pockets to other people's necessities. These are what the people who do not care much about Paul's theology generally suppose that he means here. But these do not exhaust his meaning. Paul's notion of love is the response of the human love to the Divine, which Divine is received into the heart by simple faith in Jesus Christ. And his notion of love which never faileth, and endureth all things, and hopeth all things, is love to men, which is but one stream of the great river of love to God. If we rightly understand what he means by love, we shall find that his praise of love is as theological as anything that he ever wrote. We shall never get further than barren admiration of a beautiful piece of writing, unless our love to men has the source and root to which Paul points us.

Again, let us take this great thought of the per-

manence of faith, hope, and love as being the highest conception that we can form of our future condition. It is very easy to bewilder ourselves with speculations and theories of another life. I do not care much about them. The great gates keep their secret well. Few stray beams of light find their way through their crevices. The less we say the less likely we are to err. It is easy to let ourselves be led away, by turning rhetoric into revelation, and accepting the symbols of the New Testament as if they carried anything more than images of the realities. But far beyond golden pavements, and harps, and crowns, and white robes, lies this one great thought that the elements of the imperfect, Christlike life of earth are the essence of the perfect, Godlike life in heaven. "Now abide these three, faith, hope, love."

Last of all, let us shape our lives in accordance with these certainties. The dropping away of the transient things is no argument for neglecting or despising them; for our handling of them makes our characters, and our characters abide. But it is a very excellent argument for shaping our lives so as to seek first the first things, and to secure the permanent qualities, and so to use the transient as that it shall all help us towards that which does not pass.

What will a Manchester man that knows nothing except goods and office work, and knows these only in their superficial aspect, and not as related to God, what, in the name of common-sense, will he do with himself when he gets into a world where there is not a single ledger, nor a desk, nor a yard of cloth of any sort? What will some of us do when, in like manner, we are

stripped of all the things that we have cared about, and worked for, and have made our aims down here? Suppose you knew that you were under sailing orders to go somewhere or other, and that at any moment a breathless messenger might come in and say, "Come along! we are all waiting for you"; and suppose that you never did a single thing towards getting your outfit ready, or preparing yourself in any way for that which might come at any moment, and could not but come before very long. Would you be a wise man? But that is what a great many of us are doing; doing every day, and all day long, and doing that only. "He shall leave them in the midst of his days," says a grim text, "and at his latter end shall be a fool."

What will drop? Modes of apprehension, modes of utterance, occupations, duties, relationships, loves; and we shall be left standing naked, stripped as it were, to the very quick, and only as much left as will keep our souls alive. But if we are clothed with faith, hope, love, we shall not be found naked. Cultivate the high things, the permanent things; then death will not wrench you violently from all that you have been and cared for; but it will usher you into the perfect form of all that you have been and done upon earth. All these things will pass, but faith, hope, love, "stay not behind nor in the grave are trod," but will last as long as Christ, their Object, lives, and as long as we in Him live also.

GOD'S FRIENDS.

"He was called the Friend of God."—JAMES ii. 23.

WHEN and by whom was he so called? There are two passages in the Old Testament in which an analogous designation is applied to the patriarch, but probably the name was one in current use amongst the people, and expressed in a summary fashion the impression that had been made by the history of Abraham's life. A sweet fate to have that as the brief record of a character, and to be known throughout the ages by such an epitaph! As many of us are aware, this name, "the Friend," has displaced the proper name, Abraham, on the lips of all Mohammedan people to this day; and the city of Hebron, where his corpse lies, is commonly known simply as "the Friend."

My object in this sermon is a very simple one. I merely wish to bring out two or three of the salient elements and characteristics of friendship as exercised on the human level, and to use these as a standard and test of our religion and relation to God.

But I may just notice, for a moment, how beautiful and blessed a thought it is which underlies this and similar representations of Scripture—viz., that the bond which unites us to God is the very same as that which most sweetly and strongly ties men to one another, and

that, after all, religion is nothing more or less than the transference to Him of the emotions which make all the sweetness of human life and society.

Now, I shall try to bring out two or three points which are included in that name, "the Friend of God," and to ask ourselves if they apply to our relations to Him.

I. First, friends trust and love one another.

Mutual confidence is the mortar which binds the stones in society together, into a building. It makes the difference between the herding together of beasts and the association of men. No community could keep together for an hour without mutual confidence, even in regard of the least intimate relationships of life. But it is the very life-blood of friendship. You cannot say, "A. B. is my friend, but I do not trust him." If suspicion creeps in, like the foul malaria of tropical swamps, it kills all friendship. Therefore "he was called the Friend of God" is by James deduced from the fact that "he believed God, and it was imputed to him for righteousness." You cannot make a friend of a man that you do not know where to have. There may be some vague reverence of, or abject reluctant submission to, "the unknown God," the something outside of ourselves that perhaps makes for righteousness; but for any vivid, warm throb of friendship there must be, first, a clear knowledge, and then a living grappling of that knowledge to my very heart, by my faith. Unless I trust God I cannot be a friend of God's. If you and I are His friends we trust Him, and He will trust us. For this friendship is not one-sided, and the name, though it may be ambiguous as to whether it means one

whom I love or one who loves me, really includes both persons to the compact; and there are analogous, if not identical, emotions in each. So that, if I trust God, I may be sure that God trusts me, and, in His confidence, leaves a great deal to me; and so ennobles and glorifies me by His reliance upon me.

But whilst we know that this belief in God was the very nerve and centre of Abraham's whole character, and was the reason why he was called the friend of God, we must also remember that, as James insists upon here, it was no mere idle assent, no mere intellectual conviction that God could not tell lies, which was dignified by the name of belief, but that it was, as James insists upon in the context, a trust which proved itself to be valid, because it was continually operative in the life. "Faith without works is dead." "And Abraham, our father, was he not justified by works?"

And so the Epistle to the Hebrews, if you will remember, traces up to his faith all the chief points in his life. "By faith he went out from the land where he dwelt; by faith he dwelt in tabernacles," in the promised land, believing that it should be his and his seed's; "by faith" he offered up his son on the altar.

Thus we come to this, that the heavenly and the earthly friend, like friends on the low levels of humanity, love each other because they trust each other. I have said that the words "My friend" may either mean one whom I love or one who loves me, but that the two things are in the present connection inseparable. Only let us remember where the sweet reciprocation and interchange of love begins. "We love Him because He first loved us." "When we were enemies we were

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reconciled to God by the death of His Son." And so we have to turn to that heavenly Friend, and feel that as life itself, so the love which is the life of life, has its beginning in Him, and that never would our hearts have turned themselves from their alienation, unless there had poured down upon them the attractive outflow of His great love. It was an old fancy that, wherever a tree was struck by lightning, all its tremulous foliage turned in the direction from which the bolt had come. When the merciful flash of God's great love strikes a heart, then all its tendrils turn to the source of the life-giving light, and we love back again, in sweet reverberation to the primal and original love. Dear brethren, I lay upon your heart and mine this thought, that friends trust and love each other. Do we trust and love our God?

II. Friends have frank, familiar intercourse with one another.

Let us turn to the illuminative example in our text, and remember God's frankness with Abraham. "Shall I hide from Abraham the thing that I will do?" Let us cap that,—as we can, marvellous and great as the utterance is,—by another one, "I call you not servants, but friends; for all things that I have heard of My Father I declare unto you." So much for God's frankness. What about Abraham's frankness with God? Remember how he remonstrated with Him; how he complained to Him of His dealings; how he persisted with importunity, which would have been presumptuous but for the friendship which underlay it, and warranted the bold words. And let us take the simple lesson that if we are friends and lovers of God,

we shall delight in intercourse with Him. It is a strange kind of religion that does not care to be with God, that would rather think about anything else than about Him, that is all unused to quiet, solitary conversation and communion with Him, but it is the religion of I wonder how many of us to-day. He would be a strange friend that never crossed your threshold if he could help it; that was evidently uncomfortable in your presence, and ill at ease till he got away from you, and that when he came was struck dumb, and had not a word to say for himself, and did not know or feel that he and you had any interests or subjects in common. Is that not a good deal like the religion of hosts of professing Christians? "He was called the friend of God," and he never, all his days, if he could help it, thought about Him or went near Him!

If we are friends of God, we shall have no secrets from Him. There are very few of those that are dearest to us whom we could venture to lay bare all the depths of our hearts. There are black things down in the cellars that we do not like to show to any of our friends. We receive them upstairs, in the rooms for company. But you should take God all through the house. And if there is the trust and the love that I have been speaking about, we shall not be afraid to spread out all our foulness, and our meanness, and our unworthy thoughts of, and acts towards, Him, before His "pure eyes and perfect judgment," and say, "Nobody but my best friend could look at such a dungheap, but I spread it before Thee. Look at it, and Thou wilt cleanse it; look at it, and it will melt away. Look at it, and in

the knowledge that Thou knowest, my knowledge of it will be less of a torment, and my bosom will be cleansed of its perilous stuff."

Tell God all, if you mean to be a friend of His. And do not be afraid to tell Him your harsh thoughts of Him, and your complaints of Him. He never resents anything that a man that loves Him says *about* Him, if he says it *to* Him. What He resents—if I might use the word—is our huddling up grudges and murmurings and questionings in our own hearts, and saying never a word to the friend against whom they offend. Out with it all, brethren! Complaints, regrets, questionings, petitions, hot wishes, take them all to Him; and be sure that instead of their breaking, they will if spoken, cement the friendship which is disturbed by secrecy on our parts.

If we are God's lovers, He will have no secrets from us. "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him; and He will show them His covenant." There is a strange wisdom and insight, sometimes amounting even to prophetic anticipation, which creeps into a simple heart that is knit closely to God. But whether the result of our friendship with Him be such communication of such kinds of insight or no, we may be sure of this, that, if we trust Him, and love Him, and are frank with Him, He will in so far be frank with us, that He will impart unto us Himself, and in the knowledge of His love we shall find all the knowledge that we need.

III. Friends delight to meet each other's wishes.

Let us go back to our story again. The humble, earthly friend of God did as God bade him, substantially

all his life, from the day when he made the "Great Refusal," and left behind him home and kindred and all, until the day when he went up the sides of Moriah to offer there his son. Abraham met God's wishes because Abraham trusted and loved God.

And what about the Divine Friend? Did He not meet Abraham's wishes? You remember that wonderful scene, which presents, in such vivid and dramatic form, the everlasting truth that the man who bows his will to God, bows God's will to his, when he pleaded for Sodom, and won his case by persistence and importunity of lowly prayer. And these historical notices on both sides are for us the vehicles of the permanent truth that, if we are God's lovers and friends, we shall find nothing sweeter than bowing to His will and executing His commandments. As I daresay I have often said to you, the very mark and signature of love is that it delights to divine and fulfil the desires of the beloved, and that it moulds the will of each of the parties into conformity with the will of the other.

Ah! dear brethren, what a commentary our religion is upon such thoughts! To how many of us is the very notion of religion that of a prohibition of things that we would much like to do, and of commands to do things that we had much rather not do? All the slavery of abject submission, of reluctant service, is clean swept away, when we understand that friendship and love find their supreme delight in discovering and in executing the will of the beloved. And surely if you and I are the friends of God, the cold words, "duty," "must," "should," will be struck out of our vocabulary and will be replaced by "delight," "cannot

but," "will." For friends find the very life—I was going to say the voice—of their friendship in mutual obedience.

And God, the heavenly Friend, will do what we wish. In that very connection did Jesus Christ put the two thoughts of friendship with Him and His executing His disciple's behests; saying, in one breath, "Ye are My friends if ye do whatsoever I command you," and in the next, "Ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." This conformity of will, so that there is but one will in the two hearts, which is the very consummation and superlative degree of human friendship and love, applies as truly to the friendship between man and God.

IV. Friends give gifts to each other.

Let us go back to our story. What did Abraham give God? "Forasmuch as he hath not withheld his only son from Me, I know that he fears Me." And what does God give to His friends? "He that spared not His own Son, but freely delivered Him up to the death for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" Abraham's gift of his son to God was but a feeble shadow of God's gift of His Son to men. And if the surrender on the part of the human friend was the infallible token of his love, surely the surrender on the part of the heavenly Friend is no less the infallible sign of His love to all the world. Generalise these thoughts and they come to this. If we are God's lovers God will give us Himself, in so far as we can receive Him; and all other gifts in so far as they are good and needful. If we are God's friends and lovers we shall give Him, in glad surrender, our whole selves.

And, remember, if you feel that you have separate interests from Him, if you keep things and do not let Him say, "These are Mine"; if you grudge sacrifice, and will not hear of self-surrender, and are living lives centred in, ruled by, devoted to, self, you have little reason to call yourself a Christian. "Ye are My friends if ye"—not only "do whatsoever I command you," but "if you give yourself to Me." Yield yourselves to God, and in the giving of yourselves to Him, you will get back yourselves glorified and blessed by the gift. There is no friendship if self shuts out the friend from participation in what is the other's. As long as "mine" lies on this side of a high wall, and "thine" on the other, there is but little friendship. Down with the wall, and say about everything "Ours;" and then you have a right to say "I am the friend of God."

V. Lastly, and but a word. Friends stand up for each other.

"I am thy shield; fear not, Abraham," said God, when His friend was in danger from the vengeance of the Eastern kings whom he had defeated; and all through life the same strong arm was cast around him. Abraham, on his part, had to stand up for God amidst his heathen neighbours.

If we are God's friends and lovers He will take up our cause. Be sure that if God be for us, it matters not who is against us. If we are God's friends and lovers we have to take up His cause. What would you think of a man who, in going away to a far-off country, said to some friend, "I wish you would look after so-and-so for me as long as I am gone;" and the friend would say "Yes!" and never give a thought nor lift a finger to

discharge the obligation? God trusts His reputation to you, Christian people; He has interests in this world that you have to look after. You have to defend Him as really as He has to defend you. And it is the dreadful contradiction of religious people's profession of religion that they often care so little, and do so little, to promote the cause, to defend the name, to adorn the reputation, and to further what I may venture to call the interests, of their heavenly Friend in the world.

Dear brother, looking at these things, can you venture to say that you are a friend of God? If you cannot, what are you? Our relations to men admit of our dividing them into three—friends, enemies, nothings. We may love, we may hate, we may be absolutely indifferent and ignorant. I am afraid the three states cannot be transferred exactly to our relations to God. If not His friend, what are you? Have you only a far-off, bowing acquaintance with Him? Well, then, that is because you have neglected, if you have not spurned, His offered friendship. And, oh! how much you have lost! No human heart is a millionth part so sweet, and so capable of satisfying you, as God's. All friendship here has its limits, its changes, its end. God's is boundless, immutable, eternal. All things are the friends of God's friend; and all things are arrayed against him who rejects God's friendship.

I beseech you, let Him woo you to love Him; and yield your hearts to Him. "If when we were 'enemies,' we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son," much more, being friends, all the fulness of His love and the sweetness of His heart will be poured upon us through the living Christ.

GOD'S GUESTS.

"One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life." —PSALM xxvii. 4.

WE shall do great injustice to this mystical aspiration of the psalmist, if we degrade it to be the mere expression of a desire for unbroken residence in a material temple. He was no sickly, sentimental seeker after cloistered seclusion. He knew the necessities and duties of life far better than in a cowardly way to wish to shirk them, in order that he might loiter in the temple, idle, under the pretence of worship. Nor would the saying fit into the facts of the case if we gave it that low meaning, for no person had his residence in the temple. And what follows in the next verse would, on that hypothesis, be entirely inappropriate. "In the secret of His tabernacle shall He hide me." No one went "into the secret place of the Most High," in the visible, material structure, except the high priest once a year. But this singer expects that his abode will be there always; and that, in the time of trouble, he can find refuge there.

Apart altogether from any wider considerations as to the relation between form and spirit under the Old Covenant, I think that such observations compel us to see in these words a desire a great deal nobler and deeper than any such wish.

I. Let us, then, note the true meaning of this aspiration of the psalmist's.

Its fulfilment depends not on where we are, but on what we think and feel; for every place is God's house, and what the psalmist desires is that he should be able to keep up unbroken consciousness of being in God's presence and should be always in touch with Him. That seems hard, and people say, "Impossible! how can I get above my daily work, and be perpetually thinking of God and His will, and consciously realising communion with Him?" But there is such a thing as having an undercurrent of consciousness running all through a man's life and mind; such a thing as having a melody sounding in our ears perpetually, "so sweet we know not we are listening to it" until it stops, and then, by the poverty of the naked and silent atmosphere, we know how musical were the sounds that we scarcely knew we heard, and yet did hear so well high above all the din of earth's noises.

Every man that has ever cherished such an aspiration as this knows the difficulties all too well. And yet, without entering upon thorny and unprofitable questions as to whether the absolute, unbroken continuity of consciousness of being in God's presence is possible for men here below, let us look at the question, which has a great deal more bearing upon our present condition —viz., whether a greater continuity of that consciousness is not possible than we attain to to-day. It does seem to me to be a foolish and miserable waste of time, and temper, and energy for good people to be quarrelling about whether they can come to the absolute realisation of this desire in this world, when there is not one of

them that is not leagues below the possible realisation of it, and knows that he is. At all events, whether or not the line can be drawn without a break at all, the breaks might be a great deal shorter and a great deal less frequent than they are. An unbroken line of conscious communion with God is the ideal; and that is what this singer desired and worked for. How many of my feelings and thoughts to-day, or of the things that I have said and done since I woke this morning, would have been done and said and felt exactly the same, if there were not a God at all, or if it did not matter in the least whether I ever came into touch with Him or not? Oh! dear friends, it is no vain effort to bring our lives a little nearer that unbroken continuity of communion with Him of which this text speaks. And God knows, and we each for ourselves know, how much and how sore our need is of such a union. "One thing have I desired, that will I seek after; that I"—in Mosley Street; I, in my study; I, in my shop; I, in my parlour, kitchen, or nursery; I, in my studio; I, in my lecture-hall—"may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life." In our "Father's house are many mansions." The room that we spend most of our lives in, each of us at our tasks or our work-tables, may be in our Father's house, too; and it is only we that can secure that it shall be.

The inmost meaning of this psalmist's desire is that the consciousness of God shall be diffused throughout the whole of a man's days, instead of being coagulated here and there at points. The Australian rivers in a drought present a picture of the Christian life of far too many of us—a stagnant, stinking pool here, a stretch of blinding gravel there; another little drop of water a mile away,

then a long line of foul-smelling mud, and then another shallow pond. Why! it ought to run in a clear stream, that has a scour in it, and that will take all filth off the surface.

The psalmist longed to break down the distinction between sacred and secular; to consecrate work, of whatsoever sort it was. He had learned what so many of us need to learn far more thoroughly, that if our religion does not drive the wheels of our daily business, it is of little use; and that if the field in which our religion has power to control and impel is not that of the trivialities and secularities of our ordinary life, there is no field for it at all.

"All the days of my life." Not only on Wednesday nights in this lecture room, while Tuesday and Thursday are given to the world and self; not only on Sundays; not for five minutes in the morning, when I am eager to get to my daily work, and less than five minutes at night, when I am half asleep, but through the long day, doing this, that, and the other thing for God and by God and with God, and making Him the motive and the power of my course, and my companion to heaven. And if we have, in our lives, things over which we cannot make the sign of the cross, the sooner we get rid of them the better; and if there is anything in our daily work, or in our characters, about which we are doubtful, here is a good test: does it seem to check our continual communion with God, as a ligature round the wrist might do the continual flow of the blood, or does it help us to realise His presence? If the former, let us have no more to do with it; if the latter, let us seek to increase it.

II. And now let me say a word about the psalmist's reason for this aspiration.

The word which he employs carries with it a picture, which is even more vividly given us by a synonymous word employed in the same connection in some of the other psalms. "That I may dwell in the house of the Lord"—now, that is an allusion, not only, as I think, to the temple, but also to the Oriental habit of giving a man, who took refuge in the tent of the sheikh, guest-rites of protection and provision and friendship. The habit exists to this day, and travellers among the Bedouins tell us lovely stories of how even an enemy with the blood of the closest relative of the owner of the tent on his hands, if he can once get in there and partake of the salt of the host, is safe, and the first obligation of the owner of the tent is to watch over the life of the fugitive as over his own.

So the psalmist says, "I desire to have guest-rites in Thy tent; to lift up its fold, and shelter there from the heat of the desert. And although I be dark and stained with many evils and transgressions against Thee, yet I come to claim the hospitality and provision and protection and friendship which the laws of the house do bestow upon a guest." Carrying out substantially the same idea, Paul tells the Ephesians, as if it were the very highest privilege that the Gospel brought to the Gentiles: "Ye are no more strangers, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and *of the household of God*"; incorporated into His family, and dwelling safely in His pavilion as their home.

That is to say, the blessedness of keeping up such a continual consciousness of touch with God is, first and

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foremost, the certainty of infallible protection. Oh! how it minimises all trouble and brightens all joys, and calms amidst all distractions, and steadies and sobers in all circumstances, to feel ever the hand of God upon us! He who goes through life, finding that, when he has trouble to meet, it throws him back on God, and that, when bright mornings of joy drive away nights of weeping, these wake morning songs of praise, and are brightest because they shine with the light of a Father's love, will never be unduly moved by any vicissitudes of fortune. Like some inland and sheltered valley, with great mountains shutting it in, that "heareth not the loud winds when they call" beyond the barriers that enclose it, our lives may be tranquilly free from distraction, and may be full of peace, of nobleness, and of strength, on condition of our keeping in God's house all the days of our lives.

There is another blessing that will come to the dweller in God's house, and not a small one. It is that, by the power of this one satisfied longing, driven like an iron rod through all the tortuosities of my life, there will come into it a unity which otherwise few lives are ever able to attain, and the want of which is no small cause of the misery that is great upon men. Most of us seem, to our own consciousness, to live amidst endless distractions all our days, and our lives to be a heap of links parted from each other rather than a chain. But if we have that one constant thought with us, and if we are, through all the variety of occupations, true to the one purpose of serving and keeping near God, then we have a charm against the frittering away of our lives in distractions, and the misery of multiplicity; and we

enter into the blessedness of unity and singleness of purpose; and our lives become, like the starry heavens in all the variety of their motions, obedient to one impulse. For unity in a life does not depend upon the monotony of its tasks, but upon the simplicity of the motive which impels to all varieties of work. So it is possible for a man harassed by multitudinous avocations, and drawn hither and thither by sometimes apparently conflicting and always bewildering, rapidly-following duties, to say, "This one thing I do," if all his doings are equally acts of obedience to God.

III. So, lastly, note the method by which this desire is realised.

"One thing have I desired, . . . that will I seek after." There are two points to be kept in view to that end. A great many people say, "One thing have I desired," and fail in persistent continuousness of the desire. No man gets rights of residence in God's house for a longer time than he continues to seek for them. The most advanced of us, and those that have longest been like Anna, who "departed not from the temple" day nor night, will certainly eject ourselves unless, like the psalmist, we use the verbs in both tenses, and say, "One thing *have* I desired . . . that *will* I seek after." John Bunyan saw that there was a back door to the lower regions close by the gates of the Celestial City. There may be men who have long lived beneath the shadow of the sanctuary, and at the last shall be found outside the gates.

But the words of the text not only suggest, by the two tenses of the verbs, the continuity of the desire which is destined to be granted, but also by the two verbs themselves—desire and seek after—the necessity of uniting

prayer and work. Many desires are unsatisfied because conduct does not correspond to desires. Many a prayer for greater holiness and closer communion with God remains unanswered because its pray-ers never do anything to fulfil their prayers. I do not say they are hypocrites; certainly they are not consciously so, but I do say that there is a large measure of conventionality that means nothing, in the prayers of average Christian people for more holiness and likeness to Jesus Christ.

Dear friends, if we want this desire of dwelling in the house of the Lord to be fulfilled, the day's work must run in the same direction as the morning's petition, and we must, like the psalmist, say, "I *have desired* it of the Lord, and I, for my part, *will seek after it.*" Then, whether or not we reach absolutely to the standard, which is none the less to be aimed at, though it seems beyond reach, we shall draw nearer and nearer to it; and, God helping our weakness and increasing our strength, quickening us to "desire," and upholding us to "seek after," we may hope that, when the days of our life are past, we shall but remove into an upper chamber, more open to the sunrise and flooded with light; and shall go no more out, but "dwell in the house of the Lord for ever."

YOKES OF WOOD AND OF IRON.

"Go and tell Hananiah, saying, Thus saith the Lord; Thou hast broken the yokes of wood; but thou shalt make for them yokes of iron."—JER. xxviii. 13.

I SUPPOSE I had better begin by a word of explanation as to the occasion of this saying. One king of Judah had already been carried off to Babylon, and the throne refilled by his brother, a puppet of the conquerors. This shadow of a king, with the bulk of the nation, was eager for revolt. Jeremiah had almost single-handed to stem the tide of the popular wish. He steadfastly preached submission, not so much to Nebuchadnezzar as to God, who had sent the invaders as chastisement. The lesson was a difficult one to learn, and the people hated the teacher. In the Jerusalem of Jeremiah's day, as in other places and at other times, a love of country which is not blind to its faults, and protests against a blatant militarism, was scoffed at as "unpatriotic," "playing into the hands of the enemy," "seeking peace at any price," whilst an insane eagerness to rush to arms without regard to resources or righteousness was called a "spirited foreign policy." So Jeremiah had plenty of enemies.

He had adopted a strange way of enforcing his counsel, which would be ridiculous to-day, but was natural and impressive then and there. He constantly for months

went about with an ox-yoke on his neck, as a symbol of the submission which he advocated. One day, in the temple, before a public assembly, a certain Hananiah, a member of the opposite faction, made a fierce attack on the prophet and his teaching, and uttered a counter-prophecy to the effect that, in two years, the foreign invasion would be at an end, and all would be as it used to be. Our prophet answered very quietly, saying in effect, "I hope to God that it may be true; the event will show." And then Hananiah, encouraged by his meekness, proceeded to violence, tore the yoke off his shoulders and snapped it in two; reiterating his prophecy. Then Jeremiah went away home.

Soon after, the voice which he knew to be God's, and not his own thoughts, spoke within him, and gave a much sharper answer. God declared, through Jeremiah, the plain truth that, for a tiny kingdom like Judah to perk itself up in the face of a world-conquering power like Babylon, could only bring down greater severity from the conqueror. And then He declared that Hananiah, for rebellion—not against Babylon, but against God, the true King of Israel—would be taken from the earth. He died in a couple of months.

My text forms the first word of this Divine message. I have nothing more to do with its original application. It gives a picturesque setting to a very impressive and solemn truth; very familiar, no doubt, but none the less because of its familiarity needing to be dinned into people's ears. It is that to throw off legitimate authority is to bind on a worse tyranny. To some kind of yoke every one of us must bend our necks, and if we slip them out we do not thereby become independent, but simply

bring upon ourselves a heavier pressure of a harder bondage. The remainder of my remarks will simply go to illustrate that principle in two or three cases of ascending importance. I begin at the bottom.

I. We have the choice between the yoke of law and the iron yoke of lawlessness.

We all know that society could not be held together without some kind of restraints upon what is done, and some stimulus to do what is apt to be neglected. Even a band of brigands, or a crew of pirates, must have some code. I have read somewhere that the cells in a honeycomb are circles squeezed by the pressure of the adjacent cells into the hexagonal shape which admits of contiguity. If they continued circles there would be space and material lost, and no complete continuity. So, in like manner, you cannot keep five men together without some mutual limitations which are shaped into a law. Now, as long as a man keeps inside it he does not feel its pressure. A great many of us, for instance, who are in the main law-abiding people, do not ever remember that there is such a thing as restrictions upon our license, or the obligation to perform certain duties ; for we never think, either of taking the license or of shirking the duties. The yoke that is accepted ceases to press. Once let a man step outside, and what then ? Why then he is an outlaw ; and the rough side of the law is turned outwards, and all possible terrors, which people within the boundary have nothing to do with, gather themselves together and frown down upon him. The sheep that stops inside the pasture is never torn by the barbed wires of the fence. If you think of the life of a criminal, with all its tricks and evasions, taking " every bush to be an

officer," as Shakespeare says; or as the first of the brood who was the type of them all, said, "Every man that seeth me shall kill me": if you think of the sword that hangs over the head of every law-breaker, and which he knows is hanging by a hair; if you think of men in Manchester who have manipulated the books of the firm, and who durst not be away from their desks for a day lest all should come to light; and if you think of the punishment that follows sooner or later, you will see that it is better to bear the light yoke of the law than the heavy yoke of crime. Some men buy their ruin very dearly.

So much for the individual. But there is another aspect of this same principle on which I venture to say a word, although it is only a word, in passing. I do not suppose that there are many of my congregation this evening who are likely to commit overt breaches of the law. But there are a great many of us who are apt to neglect the obligations of citizenship. In a community like ours, laziness, fastidiousness, absorption in our own occupations, and a number of other more or less reputable reasons, tempt many to stand aloof from the plain imperative obligations of every citizen in a free country. Every man who thus neglects to do his part for the common weal does his part in handing the community to the least worthy. You will find—as you see in a great many democratic countries to-day, where the cultivated classes, and the classes with the sternest morality, have withdrawn in disgust from the turmoil—the mob having the upper hand, the least worthy scrambling into high places, and the community suffering, and bearing a heavier yoke, by reason of the unwillingness of some to

bear the yoke and do the duty of a citizen. Vice lifts up its head, morality is scouted, self-interest is pursued unblushingly, and the whole tone of public opinion is lowered.

Christian men and women, remember you are members of a community, and you bear the yoke of responsibility therefore ; and if you do not discharge your obligation, then you will have a heavier burden still to bear.

I need not remind you, I suppose, of how this same thesis—that we have to choose between the yoke of law and the iron yoke of lawlessness—is illustrated in the story of almost all violent revolutions. They run the same course. First a nation rises up against intolerable oppression, then revolution devours its own children, and the scum rises to the top of the boiling pot. Then comes, in the language of the picturesque historian of the French Revolution, the type of them all—then comes at the end "the whiff of grapeshot" and the despot. First the government of a mob, and then the tyranny of an emperor crush the people that shake off the yoke of reasonable law. That is my first point.

II. We rise to a higher illustration ;—we have to choose between the yoke of virtue and the iron yoke of vice.

We are under a far more spiritual and searching law than that written in any statute book, or administered by any court. Every man carries within his own heart two things, and two persons; the court, the tribunal, the culprit, and the judge. And here, too, if law is not obeyed, the result is not liberty, but the slavery of lawlessness.

No man can ponder his own nature and make without

feeling that on every fibre of him is stamped a great law which he is bound to obey, and that on every fibre of him is impressed the necessity of part of his nature coercing, restraining, or spurring other parts of it. For, if we take stock of ourselves, what do we find? The broad basis of the pyramid, as it were, is laid in the faculties nearest the earth, the appetites which are inseparable from our corporeal being, and these know nothing about right or wrong, but are utterly blind. Put a loaf before a hungry man, and his mouth waters, whether it belongs to himself or whether it is inside a baker's window.

Then above these, as the next course of the pyramid, there are other desires, sentiments, affections, and emotions, less grossly sensuous than those of which I have been speaking, but still equally certain to be excited by the presence of their appropriate object, without any consideration of whether law is broken or kept in securing of it. Above these, which are, so to speak, branded on their very foreheads with the iron of slavery, stand certain faculties which are as clearly anointed to rule as the others are intended to serve. There is reason or intelligence, which is evidently meant to be eyes to these blind instincts and emotions of desire, and there is what we call the power of will, that stands like an engine-driver with his hand upon the lever which will either stop the engine or accelerate its revolutions. It says to passions and desires "Go!" and they go; and, alas! it sometimes says "Halt!" and they will not halt. Then there is conscience, which brings to light for every man something higher than himself. A great philosopher once said that the two sublimest things in the universe

were the moral law and the starry heavens; and that law "I ought" bends over us like the starry heavens with which he associated it. No man can escape from the pressure of duty, and on every man is laid, by his very make, the two-fold obligation, first to look upwards and catch the behests of that solemn law of duty, and then to turn his eyes and his strength inwards and coerce or spur, as the case may be, the powers of his nature, and rule the kingdom within himself.

Now, as long as a man lets the ruling parts of his nature guide the lower faculties, he feels comparatively no pressure from the yoke. But, if he once allows beggars to ride on horseback whilst princes walk—sense and appetite and desire, and more or less refined forms of inclination, to take the place which belongs only to conscience interpreting duty—then he has exchanged the easy yoke for one that is heavy indeed.

What does a man do when, instead of loyally accepting the conditions of his nature, and bowing himself to serve the all-embracing and all-penetrating law of duty, he sets up inclination of any sort in its place? What does he do? I will tell you. He unships the helm; he pitches compass and sextant overboard; he fires up the furnaces, and screws down the safety-valve, and says, "Go ahead!" And what will be the end of that, think you? Either an explosion or a crash upon a reef; and you may take your choice of which is the better kind of death—to be blown up or to go down. Keep within the law of conscience, and let it govern all inclinations, and most of all the animal part of your nature; and you will feel little pressure, and no pain, from the yoke. Shake it off and there is fulfilled in the disobedient man the

threatening of my text, which rightly translated ought to be, "Thou hast broken the yokes of wood, and thou *hast* made instead of them yokes of iron."

For do you think it will be easy to serve the base-born parts of your nature, when you set them on the throne and tell them to govern you? Did you never hear of such a thing as a man's vices getting such a hold on him that, when his weakened will tried to shake them off, they laughed in his face and said, "Here we are still"? Did you never hear of that other solemn truth—and have you never experienced it—that no man can say, "I will let my inclination have its fling this once"? There are no "this onces," or very, very seldom. When you are glissading down a snowy Alpine slope, you cannot stop when you like, though you strike the alpenstock ever so deep into the powdery snow. If you have begun, away you must go. God be thanked! the illustration does not altogether apply, for a man can stop if he will repent, but he cannot stop unless he does. Did you never hear that a teaspoonful of narcotic to-day will need to be a tablespoonful in a week or two, to produce the same effect? Are there not plenty of men who have said with all the force that a weakened will has left in it, "I will never touch a drop of drink again, as long as I live, God helping me";—and they have gone down the street, and they have turned in, not at the first or the second public-house, but at the fourth or the fifth. Ah! brother, "they promised them liberty, but they are the servants of corruption." Fix this in your minds. "He that committeth sin is the slave of sin," of the sin that he commits. And do not put off the easy yoke of obedience to conscience and duty, or you will find that there is

an iron one, with many a sharp point in its unpolished surface rubbing into your skin and wounding your shoulders. "It's wiser to be good than bad. It's safer to be meek than fierce." "Thou hast broken the yokes of wood"; it is not difficult to do that; "thou hast made instead of them yokes of iron." That is my second point.

III. Lastly, we have the choice between the yoke of Christ and the iron yoke of godlessness.

You may think that is a very harsh saying, and much too vehement an antithesis. Let me vindicate it according to my own belief in a sentence or two. It seems to me that for civilised and cultivated Europe at this day, the choice lies between accepting Jesus Christ as the Revealer of God, or wandering away out into the wastes of uncertainty, or as they call it nowadays, agnosticism and doubt. I believe myself, and I venture to state it here—though there is not time to do more than state it—that no form of what is now called Theism, which does not accept the historic revelation of God in Jesus Christ as the master-light of all our seeing, will ever be able to sustain itself permanently in the face of present currents of opinion. If you do not take Christ for your Teacher, you are handed over either to the uncertainty of your own doubts, or to pinning your faith to some man and enrolling yourself as a disciple who is prepared to swallow down whole whatsoever the rabbi may say, giving to him what you will not give to Jesus; or else you will sink back into utter indolence and carelessness about the whole matter; or else you will go and put your belief and your soul into the hands of a priest, and shut your eyes and open your mouth and take whatever tradition

may choose to send you. The one refuge from all these, as I believe, is to go to Him and learn of Him, and take His yoke upon your shoulders.

But, let me say further, it is better to obey Christ's commandments than to set ourselves against them. For if we will take His will for our law, and meekly assume the yoke of loyal and loving obedience to Him, the door into an earthly paradise is thrown open to us. His yoke is easy, not because its prescriptions and provisions lower the standard of righteousness and morality, but because love becomes the motive ; and it is always blessed to do that which the Beloved desires. When "I will" and "I ought" cover exactly the same ground, then there is no kind of pressure from the yoke. Christ's yoke is easy because, too, He gives the power to obey His commandments. His burden is such a burden (as I think one of the old fathers puts it) as sails are to a ship or wings to a bird. They add to the weight, but they carry that which carries them. So Christ's yoke bears the man that bears it. It is easy, too, because "in," and not only after or for, "keeping of it there is great reward" ; seeing that He commands nothing which is not congruous with the highest good, and bringing along with it the purest blessing. Instead of that yoke, what has the world to offer, or what do we get to dominate us, if we cast off Christ ? Self, the old anarch self, and that is misery. To be self-ruled is to be self-destroyed.

I have not time, nor is there any need that I should remind you of how it is better to accept Christ's providences than to kick against them. Sorrow to which we submit loses all its bitterness and much of its sadness. Kicking against the affliction makes its sharp

point penetrate our limbs. The bird that will dash itself against the wires of its cage beats itself all bloody and torn. Let us take the providence and it ceases to be hard.

One last word;—we all carry an iron yoke upon our shoulders. For, hard as it is for us preachers to get our friends that listen to us to believe and realise it, "We all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." That yoke is on us all. And I, for my part, believe that no man by his own efforts can cast it off, but that the attempt to do so often brings greater strength to the sins that we seek to cast out, just as the more you mow the grass, the thicker and the stronger it grows. So I come with the great message which Jesus Christ Himself struck as the keynote and prelude of His whole ministry, when in the synagogue He said, "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me . . . to preach deliverance to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound." He, and He only, will break every yoke and let the oppressed go free. And then He addresses us, after He has done that, with the immortal words, the sweetness of whose sound, sweet as it is, is less than the sweetness of their sense: "Take My yoke upon you . . . and ye shall find rest to your souls."

Oh, brother! will you not answer, "Oh, Lord! truly I am Thy servant. Thou hast loosed my bonds, and thereby bound me for ever to wear Thy yoke"; as the slave clings to his ransomer, and delights to serve him all the days of his life?

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE HIDDEN AND REVEALED.

"Thy word have I hid in my heart."—PSALM cxix. 11.
"I have not hid Thy righteousness in my heart."—PSALM xl. 10.

THEN there are two kinds of hiding—one right and one wrong: one essential to the life of the Christian, one inconsistent with it. He is a shallow Christian who has no secret depths in his religion. He is a cowardly or a lazy one, at all events an unworthy one, who does not exhibit, to the utmost of his power, his religion. It is bad to have all the goods in the shop window; it is just as bad to have them all in the cellar. There are two aspects of the Christian life—one between God and myself, with which no stranger intermeddles; one patent to all the world. My two texts touch these two.

I. "I have hid Thy Word within my heart." There we have the word hidden, or the secret religion of the heart.

Now, I have often had occasion to remind you that the Old Testament use of the word "heart" is much wider than our modern one, which limits it to being the seat and organ of love, affection, or emotion; whereas in the Old Testament the "heart" is the very vital centre of the personal self. As the Book of Proverbs

has it—"out of it are the issues of life"—all the outgoings of activity of every kind, both that which we ascribe to the head and that which we ascribe to the heart. These come, according to the Old Testament idea, from this central self. And so, when the psalmist says "I have hid Thy Word within my heart," he means "I have buried it deep in the very midst of my being, and put it down at the very roots of myself, and there incorporated it with the very substance of my soul."

Now, I venture to take that expression, "Thy Word," in a somewhat wider sense than the psalmist employed it. There are three ideas conveyed by that expression in Scripture; and two of them are distinctly found in this psalm.

First, there is the plain, obvious one, which means by "the Word," written revelation. The Bible of the psalmist was a very small volume compared with ours. The Pentateuch, and perhaps some of the historical books, possibly also one or two of the prophets—and these were about all. Yet this fragmentary word he "hid in his heart." Now, dear brethren, I wish to say a very practical thing or two, and I begin with this. If you want to be strong Christian people, hide the Bible in your heart. When I was a boy the practice of good Christian folk was to read a daily chapter. I wonder if that is kept up. I gravely suspect it is not. There are, no doubt, a great many causes contributing to the comparative decay amongst professing Christians, of Bible reading and Bible study. There is modern "higher criticism," which has a great deal to say about how and when the books were made, especially the

books that composed this psalmist's Bible. But I want to insist that no theories, were they ever so well established—as I take leave to say they are not—no theories about these secondary questions touch the value of Scripture as a factor in the development of the Christian life. Whatever a man may think about these, he will be none the less alive, if he is wise, to the importance of the daily devotional study of Scripture.

Then there are another set of reasons for the neglect of Scripture, in the multiplication of other forms of literature. People have so many other books to read now, that they have not much time for reading their Bibles, or, if they have, they think they have not. No literature will ever take the place of the old Book. Why! even looked at as a mere literary product there is nothing in the world like it. And no religious literature, sermons, treatises, still less magazines and periodicals, will do for Christian men what the Bible will do for them. You make a tremendous mistake, for your own souls' sake, if your religious reading consists in what people have said and thought about Scripture, more than in the Scripture itself. Why should you dip your cans into the reservoir, when you can take them up to where the spring comes gushing out of the hillside, pure and limpid and living?

Then there is the drive of our modern life which crowds out the Word. Get up a quarter of an hour earlier and you will have time to read your Bibles. It will be well worth the sacrifice, if it is a sacrifice. I do not mean by reading the Bible what, I am afraid, is far too common, reading a scrap of Scripture as if it were a kind of charm.

But I would most earnestly press upon you that muscle and fibre will distinctly atrophy and become enfeebled, if Christian people neglect the first plain way of hiding the Word in their heart, which is to make the utterances of Scripture as if incorporated with their very being, and part of their very selves.

But there is another use of the expression, "Thy Word," which is not without example in this great psalm of praise of the Word. In one place in it we read, "For ever, O Lord! Thy Word is settled in heaven"; that is not the Bible. "Thy faithfulness is unto all generations. They continue this day according to Thy ordinances"; these are not the Bible—"for all Thy servants." "Unless Thy law had been my delight, I should have perished in my afflictions"; I think that is not the Bible either, but it is the utterance of God's will, as expressed in the psalmist's affliction. God's Word comes to us in His providences and in many other ways. It is the declaration of His character and purposes, however they are declared, and the expression of His will and command, however expressed. In that wider sense of the expression, I would say, hide that manifested will of God in your hearts. Let us cultivate the habit of bringing all "the issues of life"—the streams that bubble up from that fountain in the centre of our being—into close relation to what we know to be God's will concerning us. Let the thought of the will of God sit sovereign arbiter, enthroned in the very centre of our personality, ruling our will, bending it and making it yielding and conformed to His, governing our affections, regulating our passions, restraining our desires, stimulating our slothfulness, quickening our aspirations, lifting heavenwards

our hopes, and bringing the whole of the activities that well up from our hearts, into touch with the will of God. Cast the healing branch into the very eye of the fountain, and then all the streams will partake of the cleansing. Let that known will of God be as the leaven hid in three measures of meal till the whole was leavened. A fanciful interpretation of that emblem makes the three measures to mean the triple constituents of humanity, body, soul, and spirit. We may smile at the fantastic exposition, but let us take heed to obey the exhortation. When God's will is deeply planted within, it will work quickening change on the heavy dough of our sluggish natures. It is when we bring the springs of our actions —namely, our motives, which are our true selves—into touch with His uttered will, that our deeds become conformed to it. Look after the motives, and the deeds will look after themselves. "I have hid Thy word within my heart."

And now I venture upon a further application of this phrase, of which the psalmist had no notion, but which, in God's great mercy, in the progress of Revelation, we can make. There is a better Word of God than the Bible; there is a better Word of God than any uttered will in His providences and the like. There is the Incarnate Word of God, who "was from the beginning with God, and was God," and is manifested in these last times unto us. I am keeping well within the analogy of Scripture teaching when I see the perfecting of Revelation by the spoken word as reached in the Revelation by the personal word; and when, in addition to the exhortation, to hide the Scripture in your hearts, and to hide the uttered will of God, however uttered, in your hearts, I

add, let us hide Christ in our hearts. For He will dwell in our hearts by faith, and if He is shrined within the curtains of the secret place within us, and that is "the secret place of the Most High," then, in the courts of the sanctuary, there will be a pure sacrifice and a priest clad "in the beauties of holiness."

II. The Word not hidden, or the religion of the outward life.

Our second text brings into view the outer side of the devout life, that which is turned to the world. The Word is to be hidden in the heart, for this very end of being then revealed in the life. For what other purpose is it to be set in the centre of our being and applied to the springs of action, than to mould action, and so to be displayed in conduct? It is not to be hid like some forgotten and unused treasure in a castle-vault, but to be buried deep in a living person, that it may affect all that person's character and acts. "There is nothing hidden, but that it should come abroad." The deepest, sacredest, most secret Christian experiences are to be operative on the outward life. A man may be caught up into the third heavens and there hear words which mortal speech cannot utter, but the incommunicable vision should tell on his patience and fortitude, and influence his Christian work. Nor is our manifestation of the springs of our action to be confined to conduct. However eloquent it is, it will be all the more intelligible, for the commentary supplied by confession with the mouth. Speech for Christ is a Christian obligation. "What ye hear in the ear, that proclaim ye on the housetops." True, there is a legitimate reticence about the depths of personal religion, which needs very strong

reasons to warrant its being broken through. Peter told Mark nothing of the interview which he had with Christ on the Resurrection morning, but he must have told the fact. We shall do well to be silent as to what passes between Jesus and us in secret; but we shall not do well if, coming from our private communion with Him, we do not "find" some to whom we can say, "We have found the Messiah," and so bring them to Jesus.

The Word, if hid in the heart, will certainly be manifest in the life. For not only is it impossible for a man who deeply and continually realises God's will, and lives in touch with Jesus Christ, to prevent these experiences from visibly affecting His life and conduct, but also in the measure in which we have that conscious inward possession of the Divine Word and the Divine Christ we shall be impelled to manifest them to our fellows by every means in our power. What, then, is the inference to be drawn from the fact that there are thousands of professing Christian people in Manchester, who never felt the slightest touch of a necessity to make known the Master whom they say they serve? They must be very shallow Christians, having no depth of experience, or that experience would insist on coming out. True Christian emotion is like a fire smouldering within some substance, that never rests till it burns its way to the outside. As one of the prophets puts it, "I said I will speak no more in Thy name"; he goes on to tell how his resolve of silence gave way under the pressure of the unuttered speech—"Thy Word shut up in my bones was like a fire, and I was weary of forbearing and I could not stay." So it will always be. Every genuine conviction demands utterance. A full

heart needs the relief of speech. If you feel no need to show your allegiance and love to Christ by speech as well as by life, I shrewdly suspect you have little love or allegiance to hide.

Further, the more we show, the more need there is for us to cultivate the hidden element in our religion. If I were talking to ministers I should have a great deal to say about that. There are preachers who preach away their own religion. The two attitudes of mind in imparting and in receiving are wholly different; and if one is allowed to encroach upon the other, nothing but harm can come. "As thy servant was busy here and there, he was gone!" That is the short account of the decay of personal religion in many a life outwardly diligent in Christian work. If there is a proportionate cultivation of the hidden self, then the act of manifesting will tend to strengthen it. It is meant that our Christian convictions and affections should grow in strength and in transforming power upon ourselves, by reason of utterance; just as when you let air in, the fire burns brighter. But it is quite possible that we may dissipate and scatter our feeble religion by talking about it; and some of us may be in danger of that. The loftier you mean to build your tower, the deeper must be the foundation that you dig. The more any of us are trying to do for Jesus Christ, the more need there is that we increase our secret communion with Jesus Christ.

We may wrongly hide our religion so that it evaporates. Too many professing Christians put away their religion as careless housewives might do some precious perfume, and when they go to take it out, they find nothing but a rotten cork, a faint odour and an empty flask. Take care

of burying your religion so deep, as dogs do bones, that you cannot find it again, or if you do, discover, when you open the coffin, that it holds only a handful of dry dust.

The heart has two actions. In one it opens its portals. and expands to receive the inflowing blood which is the life. In the other it contracts to drive the life through the veins. For health there must be both motions ; the receptiveness, in the secret "hiding of the Word in the heart" ; the expulsive energy in the "not hiding Thy righteousness in my heart."

LITTLE FORGIVENESS, LITTLE LOVE.

"To whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little."—LUKE vii. 47.

THAT was a strangely-assorted trio which met in the Pharisee's house, consisting of our Lord, Simon, and this nameless woman. The host had been barely courteous to his invited guest, and he was evidently much scandalised at the intrusion of a very undesirable addition to his company, in the person of the "woman that was a sinner," and not a little disgusted both with her vehement tokens of love and Christ's acceptance of them. So, our Lord addressed to him that lovely little parable of the two debtors, forgiven respectively fifty pence and five hundred; and loving proportionally. It was His defence of the woman for giving, and of Himself for receiving, her tearful kiss and anointing; and it drove a sharp arrow right into the conscience of Simon. It laid down two principles: that forgiveness precedes and is the cause of love; and that the measure of forgiveness is the measure of love.

That being the force of the parable, it is clear that the words preceding my text cannot have the significance which has sometimes been attached to them. "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven, *for* she loved much," cannot mean that her love was the reason for forgiveness, else it would go dead in the teeth of the preceding

parable. The ambiguity lies in the double use of that word "for," which may sometimes stand as introducing the evidence of a thing, and sometimes as bringing forward its cause. For instance, we may say, "a man lives, for he moves." His motion is the token, the evidence, the proof of his living. Or we may turn the sentence about the other way, and say "he moves, for he lives." His life is the cause of his motion. And so here:—"she hath much forgiven," as is evident from the fact that she loves much; and the love has flowed from the forgiveness. Only so can that clause be brought into harmony with the clause which I have taken for my text, which is but the same principle set forth in regard to small sins, "To whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little"; forgiveness is the cause and the measure of love.

Now, if we thus understand the words of my text, they present to us two or three rather remarkable views. We have here Christ speaking about little sins, little forgiveness, and little love. Let me look at these three."

I. First, here we have the acknowledgment of little sins.

Our Lord fully recognises the real distinction between the respectable Simon and the profligate woman. The one owed five hundred pence, and the other only owed fifty. In one aspect there was a true superiority in the man who all his life had kept his passions under control, and had sought to order his life in conformity with the laws of propriety and morality, over this wretched woman, all defaced and scarred by her own lusts and the deeds that flowed from these. Much harm has been done by the exaggeration which earnest Christians have some-

times indulged in, as to the absolute equality, in the sight of God, of all the varieties of human conduct which have not in them the saving leaven of faith in Jesus Christ and obedience to Him. It is *not* the same, either in the view of common morality and common sense or in the view of Christianity, which is only the perfection of both, whether a man drives a coach and six through all the prescriptions of common morality and propriety, or whether he keeps himself within those limits. We have to take distinctly into our account the difference between great and little sins; and the parable of my text has no meaning, unless it lays deep and broad the confirmation of the principle which the common-sense of the world recognises, and has sometimes been offended by Christian teachers' exaggerations that seem to contradict it. There *are* great and there *are* little sins.

But that is not all. "Little" here applies not only to the distinction between the magnitude of the transgressions, considered in themselves, but also to the difference between men's estimates of the magnitude of their own transgressions. If I might venture to use a somewhat abstract word, there is an objective distinction in the sins themselves, as the parable declares; and there is a subjective distinction in men's consciousness of the sins. To both of these our Lord here applies this designation.

It may further clear the thought, if I remind you that the measure of a sin is by no means determined by taking its superficial dimensions. *We* weigh conduct in rude scales, like those that they weigh hay in. The Lord, who is "a God of Knowledge, and by whom actions are weighed," has an infinitely finer balance than that;

such as chemists use in their laboratories. And many an act which, measured by the rude measuring-lines that men apply, stands out as a great sin is in reality less tainted with the poison of self-will and sin than are some of the respectable acts of reputable and highly-esteemed men. Perhaps Simon was a worse man than the woman was a woman. If we bring into view opportunities of ignorance or of knowledge ; if we try to take into account and unravel the tangled skein of motives which are spun and woven into the web of action; if we regard not the outside but the inside of the deed, we shall pause before we allocate it, by our rough discrimination, into the category of "great" or of "small" sins. Many criminals that have died on the scaffold were perhaps less sinners than some of you complacent people that are sitting in these pews this morning. Great sins and small ones there are, but you cannot get at their difference in magnitude by looking at their outside.

And there is another thing to be remembered, which limits the distinction in my text, in so far as it is taken to apply to the actual magnitude of the deed in itself. It is that, properly speaking, there are no small sins, inasmuch as nothing which affects wrongly our relation to God can be regarded as a little thing. An inch-long snake is a snake; a baby crocodile just hatched out of the egg will snap with its ugly jaws. It is quality, not quantity, by which we have to arrange men and acts. A little deed may be a great sin, and nothing which affects my relation to God, and involves the lifting up of my will against Him, can be estimated as being a small matter.

And so we come to this, that, whilst the distinction between sins as in themselves great and small can only be sustained with much limitation and with many explanations, the fancy that many of us have that our sins are small is utterly incapable of being sustained at all. We measure ourselves by ourselves, and compare ourselves with ourselves; and when we see this, that, or the other outrageous transgression of the commonest laws of morality, we gather our skirts together with Pharisaical self-complacency, and we say, "I thank Thee that I am not as other men are." Ah! brethren, we have only to go a little down below the surface, to find that our clean respectability may cover far darker things than does the tattered, spotted profligacy of the publicans and harlots.

Now, that is all threadbare commonplace, but, like so many other commonplaces, it is so familiar to us that we never realise it. For there is nothing that has less power over a man than a universally-admitted truth, which he has never vivified by bringing into contact with his own experience. Have you been down into the cellars of your own hearts? Have you made acquaintance with the combustibles that are stored there? Have you seen the creeping things in embryo, that want but warmth and favourable circumstances to bring them out to buzz, and crawl, and sting? I believe that no man who has seen himself as he is will ever remain contented with that superficial view, that he comes into the category of the little sinners.

I read lately of a man that saw a shadowgraph of his own skull, taken by the Röntgen rays; and the sight was such a shock to him that it upset his nervous system

for days. I know that if you and I saw ourselves—the hidden man that lies beneath all this fair mask of flesh and blood, as God sees us, and as we shall one day see ourselves, there would be a long good-bye to the delusion that we belong to the class of respectable, little sinners.

II. And now, secondly, we have here the principle—if little sin then little forgiveness.

That strikes one as strange, but I think the story fairly bears it out. Simon was a sort of disciple. Our Lord's parable implies that he had received forgiveness. He was the debtor that owed fifty pence, and, in comparison with the woman's long score, he did owe but fifty. What he knew himself to have done wrong he had repented of, and what he had repented of he had been forgiven. So the parable implies; and we have no right to traverse our Lord's estimate of the man's condition and relation to sin and to God. On the one hand his moral respectability, on the other hand his Pharisaical spirit of self-righteousness, had hindered him from going to the bottom of his own nature. He did not know how much he required to be pardoned. He owned to fifty pence; and because he owned to so much debt he had it forgiven. What about all the great score that was not in his books, but was in God's? Well! that was not forgiven. And so he had but a partial, a superficial, a little forgiveness.

My brother! that is the type of hosts of shallow, nominal Christians who never have come to a sight of their own true condition, but have had a partial, shallow, half-and-half repentance, and, I venture to say, have therefore been capable of receiving only a partial, shallow, half-and-half forgiveness. There are doubtless

some such among my present hearers who—God forbid that I should deny it!—may have had this surface work, but who know very little of the great depths which lie in their hearts craving for healing and for cleansing, and so have received but little of the power that cleanses and forgives.

Dear brethren, whether we get that pardon, which we all need, in scanty drops or in a full flood depends upon ourselves, and is settled by the measure of our recognition of our own sinfulness and the measure of our true repentance. A great many Christian teachers, in the earnestness of their urging faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, forget to urge with equal earnestness, and with equal prominence the other thing which, in the Apostolic preaching, was never divorced from it, and that is, repentance towards God. Just as a little faith brings a little of Christ, and much faith brings much of Him, a little repentance brings a little pardon, and a deep, profound consciousness and hatred of my own sinfulness brings the full flood of forgiving grace. To whom his sin was little the same had forgiveness to match.

III. Lastly, if little forgiveness then little love.

Our Lord here seems to limit real, answering love of heart to God, to men who have experienced pardon. And I, for my part, believe that whilst there are many other aspects of the Divine nature, and many other phases of the Divine dealings which may, and do, lead to a certain partial recognition of His goodness and answering love, there is nothing that does so overmaster a soul, and bring it to a continual self-surrendering attitude of love to God, as is the experience of pardon.

We must begin there, brethren, if we are ever to

get into the depths of a joyful devotion to Him. Other things, the greatness of His gifts to us, as scattered in Nature, as poured upon us in our daily experience—all the other things that may kindle some form and degree of love to God, are partial in their effects; like the sun pouring down its heat upon the glaciers in the Himalayas, and melting the surface into water for an hour or two in the middle of the day, but when night comes the grip of the frost-demon hushes the little trickling streams again, and all is icebound once more. There is only one thing that will melt a human heart down into perennial and warm devotion of love, and that is the experience of God's pardoning mercy. The iceberg floats southwards to the tropical sea, and there it melts into the warm ocean that has melted it. So love comes from pardon, and in its perfection it comes from nothing else.

But not only does our Lord here lay down that principle, but the further one, that the measure of forgiveness experienced is the measure of love returned. I have already drawn the distinction between the objective and the subjective greatness and littleness of men's sins. And in regard to both it is true that to whom little is forgiven the same loveth little. The principle may be a dangerous one, and capable of abuse, but it seems to me to be a sound one, and one taught us in many places in Scripture, and confirmed by much experience, that, as a rule, the men who have been dragged out of the foulest mire of grossest sin are the men who, in their Christian lives, are the most signal examples of fervent love. I do not say the greater the sinner the greater the saint; and I quite feel that there are many exceptions and limitations to the principle. But for all that

I think it is true that such a man generally makes a more earnest, a more fervent, a more humble, a more loving Christian, than people who, with a less revolutionary experience, have been kept innocent of much transgression before they were converted, and who walk with Christ, peacefully, perhaps, but with less of the sense of contrast, than such a man has. Clean, dry sand bears no weeds, but it will not bear any flowers. A bed of fertile soil, untilled and uncultivated, will be abundant in weeds, but it will be abundant in wheat crops, too. Though we must be careful as to how far we push the principle, I think the principle is a true one, that the greatest sinners, judged from the external point of view, do often make the most fervent saints.

But however we may think that to be questionable, the other aspect of this principle is unquestionable. And that is that the measure of a man's sense of forgiveness is the measure of his love. That is the key to the impotence and tepidity of all the forms of Christianity which make light of sin, and do not give a prominent place to Christ's work of redemption. Because they have failed to apprehend the greatness, the foulness, and universality of the fact of sin, you find them impotent to help and heal. And wherever you get a type of Christian that pooh-poohs the depth, the universality, the fatalness of human transgression, and stammers in its utterance of the great truth of Divine redemption, there you get a form of Christianity that has as much as it can do to keep its poor, cold limbs alive, and will never effect anything for the world.

Here, too, you get the explanation of the coldness

of many nominal Christians. A cool, sober standard of feeling in matters of religion is much vaunted by some people nowadays. It seems to me that the last thing we want is this cool Christianity. A cool Christian is a monstrosity; for if there be any truth in the things that he says he believes, and any reality in the blessings that he says he possesses, they ought to fire his whole heart into a rapture of love and a perfection of self-surrender.

Brethren, enthusiasm should be the mark of every Christian soul. And the only way to get it is to realise my own guilt, and Christ's great redemption. Let me beseech you to think of yourselves, not measuring yourselves by the common standards of worldly morality, nor by comparison with the men round you, nor by reference only to the acts that you do or abstain from, but with careful investigation of motives and testing yourselves by that solemn law which is the minimum of man's duty, and every falling beneath which is man's sin, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind." Have I done that? If I have not, a long farewell to all self-complacent nonsense about my little sins.

And then, let us come to Him, and recognise the price which has been paid for our forgiveness, the completeness with which it is rendered, and the great gifts which follow it, and are bestowed upon us bankrupts. And when we have learnt that He "frankly forgives" the five-hundred-pence debtor as the fifty-pence debtor, then we shall have our hearts touched into a passion of love altogether unattainable by any other means.

Better to be like the sinful woman in her penitence and her gratitude than like the self-complacent Simon, with his superficial view of his own sin and need, who, having but little sense of his guilt, was capable of receiving but a shrunken flow of pardon; and therefore, like some imperfectly watered garden, was able to produce but half-developed and scentless flowers. For us the one place to take is the place of the penitent: "Pardon mine iniquity, for it is very great." He that has little consciousness of sin will have little consciousness of pardon; and he that has little sense of forgiveness for which to be grateful will have little glow of love to gladden his heart and to fire his life.

THE TWO PATHS.

"Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it."—MATT. vii. 13-14.

A FRANK statement of the hardships and difficulties involved in a course of conduct does not seem a very likely way to induce men to adopt it, but it often proves so. There is something in human nature which responds to the bracing tonic of the exhortation: "By doing so-and-so you will have to face many hardships and many difficulties which you may avoid by leaving it alone; but do it, because it is best in the long run, being right from the beginning." So the story of the martyrs' fires has lighted many a man to the faith for which the martyr was burned. Many a youth has been led to take the shilling and enlist by reading accounts of wounds and battles and sufferings.

Our Lord will have no soldiers in His army on false pretences. They shall know exactly what they have to reckon on, if they take service with Him. And thus, in the solemn and familiar words of my text, He enjoins each of us to become His disciples; and that not only because—as is sometimes supposed—of the blessing that lies at the end for His servants, but because of the very things on the road to the end which, at first sight, seemed

difficulties. For you will observe that in my text the exhortation: "Enter ye in at the strait gate," is followed by two clauses, each of which begins with a "for"; the one being a description of the road that is to be shunned; the other, an account of the path that is to be followed. In each description there are four contrasted particulars: the gate, strait or wide; the road, narrow or broad; the travellers, many or few; and the ends, life or destruction.

Now, people generally read these words as if our Lord was saying, "*Though* the one path is narrow and rugged and steep and unfrequented, yet walk on it, because it leads to life; and *though* the other is the opposite of all these thing, yet avoid it, because pleasant and popular as it is, its end is destruction." But that is not what He says. All four things are reasons for avoiding the one and following the other; which, being turned into plain English, is just this, that we ought to be Christian people precisely because there are difficulties and pains and sacrifices in being so, which we may ignobly shirk if we like. It is not, *Though* the road be narrow it leads to life, therefore enter it; but *Because* it is narrow, and leads to life, therefore blessed are the feet that are set upon it.

Let me, then, now look with you for a few moments at these four characteristics, and note how they all enforce the merciful summons which our Lord is addressing to each of us, as truly as He did to the people gathered around Him on the mountain: "Enter ye in at the strait gate."

I. The gates.

The gate comes into view here merely as a means of access to the road, and the metaphor simply comes to

this, that it is more difficult to be a Christian man than not to be one, and therefore you ought to be one.

Now, what makes a Christian? We do not need to go further than this Sermon on the Mount for answer. The two first of our Lord's beatitudes, as they are called, are, "Blessed are the poor in spirit," and "Blessed are they that mourn." These two carry the conditions of entrance on the Christian life. There must be consciousness of our own emptiness, weakness, and need; there must be penitent recognition of our own ill-desert, and lamentation over that. These two things, the consciousness of emptiness, and the sorrow for sin, make—I was going to say—the two door-posts of the narrow gate through which a man has to press. It is too narrow for any of his dignities or honours. A camel cannot go through the eye of a needle, not only because of its own bulk, but because of the burdens which flap on either side of it, and catch against the jambs. All my self-confidence, and reputation, and righteousness, will be rubbed off when I try to press through that narrow aperture. You will find on some lonely moor low, contracted openings that lead into tortuous passages—the approaches to some of the ancient "Pict's houses," where a feeble folk dwelt, and secured themselves from their enemies. The only way to get into them is to go down upon your knees; and the only way to get into this road—the way of righteousness—is by taking the same attitude. No man can enter unless—like that German Emperor that a pope kept standing in the snow for three days outside the gate of Canossa—he is stripped of everything, down to the hair-shirt of penitence.

Further, we have to go in one by one. Two cannot pass the turnstile at the same time. We have to enter singly, as we shall have to pass through the other "dark gates, across the wild which no man knows," at the end of life. And that is not easy. Naaman wanted to be healed as a great man in the court of Damascus. He had to strip himself of his offices, and dignities, and pride, and to come down to the level of any other leper. You and I, dear brother, have to go through the same process of stripping ourselves of all the adventitious accretions that have clung to us, and to know ourselves naked and helpless, before we can pass through the gate.

So it is strait. It is a great deal easier to stop outside, as so many of those to whom I speak are doing. For that you have nothing to do but to drift and let things drift. No decision nor effort is needed; no coming out of yourselves. It is all as easy as it is for a wild animal to enter in between the broadly extending palisades that converge as they come nearer the trap, so that the creature is snared before he knows. The gate is wide; that is the sure condemnation of it. It is always easy to begin bad and unworthy things, of all sorts. And there is nothing easier than to keep in the negative position which so many of this audience, I fear me, are in, of not being a Christian.

But, on the other side, it is not so hard as it looks to go in, and it is not so easy as it seems to stop out. For there are two men in every man—a better and a worse; and what fits the one disgusts the other. The choice which each of us has to make is whether we shall do the things that are easiest to our worst self, or those

that are easiest to our best self. For in either case there will be difficulties; in either case there will be antagonisms.

But it is good for us to make the effort, apart altogether from the end. If there were no life eternal at the far end of the road which at this end has the narrow gate, it would contribute to all that is noblest and best in our characters, and to the repression of all that is ignoble and worst, that we should take that lowly position which Christ requires, and by the heroism of a self-abandoning faith, fling ourselves into His arms.

Remember, too, that the narrow gate, by reason of its very narrowness, is in the noblest sense wide. If there were anything else required of a man than simply self-distrust and reliance on Jesus Christ, then this great Gospel that I am feebly trying to preach in this sermon would be a more sectional and narrower thing than it is. But its glory is that it requires nothing which any man is unable to bring, that it has no invitation for sections, classes, grades of culture or intelligence or morality, but that in its great cosmopolitanism and universality it comes to every man; because it treats all as on one level, and requires only from each what all may render—knowledge of themselves as sinners, and humble trust in Jesus Christ as a Saviour. It is narrow because there is no room for sin or self-righteousness to go in; it is wide as the world, and, like the capacious portals of some vast cathedral, ample enough to receive without hustling, and to accommodate without inconvenience, every soul of man.

II. Notice the contrast of the two roads, which, in

like manner, points the exhortation to choose the better.

The one is broad; the other is narrow. Which, being turned into plain English, is just this—that the Christian course has limitations which the godless man knows nothing about; and that on the path of godlessness or Christlessness there is a deceptive appearance of freedom and independence which attracts many.

Narrow is the road. Yes, if you are to be a Christian, you must have your whole life concentrated on, and consecrated to, one thing; and, just as the vagrant rays of sunshine have to be collected into a focus before they burn, so the wandering manifoldnesses of our aims and purposes have all to be brought to a point, "This one thing I do," and whatsoever we do we have to do it as in God, and for God, and by God, and with God. Therefore, the road is narrow because, being directed to one aim, it has to exclude great tracts on either side, in which people that have a less absorbing and lofty purpose wander and expatiate at will. As on some narrow path in Eastern lands, with high, prickly-pear hedges on either side, and vineyards stretching beyond them, with luscious grapes in abundance, a traveller has to keep on the road, within the prickly fences, dusty though it may be, and though his thirsty lips may be cracking.

I remember once going to that strange island-fortress off the Normandy coast, which stands on an isolated rock in the midst of a wide sandy bay. One narrow causeway leads across the sands. Does a man complain of having to keep it? It is safety and life, for on either side stretches the tremulous sand, on which,

if a foot is planted, the pedestrian is engulfed. So the narrow way which we have to travel is a highway cast up, on which no evil will befall us, while on either side stretch away out to the horizon the treacherous quicksands. Narrowness is sometimes safety. If the road is narrow it is the better guide, and they who travel along it travel safely. Restrictions and limitations are of the essence of all nobleness and virtue. "So did not I because of the fear of the Lord."

Set side by side with that the competing path. Wide? Yes! "Do as you like"—that is sufficiently wide. And even where that gospel of the animal has not become the guide to a man, there are plenty of occupations, pursuits, recreations which men who lack the supreme consecration that comes through over-mastering love to Jesus Christ that has redeemed them, may legitimately in their own estimation do, but which no Christian man should do. But, as I said before about the gates, it is not so easy as it looks to walk the broad road, nor so hard as it seems to tread the narrow one. For "her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace;" and, on the other hand, licentiousness and liberty are not the same thing, and true freedom is not to do as you like, but to like to do as you ought. Besides, the path which looks attractive, and tempts to the indulgence of many appetites and habits which a Christian man must rigidly subdue, does not continue so attractive. Earthly pleasures have a strange knack of losing their charm, and, at the same time, increasing their dominion, with familiarity. Many a man that has plunged into some kind of dissipation because of the titillation of his senses which he found in it, discovers that the titillation

diminishes and the tyranny increases; and that when he thought that he had bought a joy, he had sold himself slave to a master.

So, dear friends, and especially you young people, let me beseech you to be suspicious of courses of conduct which come to you with the whisper, "pleasant, sweet." If you have two things before you, one of which is easy and the other hard, ninety times out of a hundred it will be safe for you to choose the hard one, and the odd ten times it will be at least as well for you to choose it. "Thus we travel to the stars." As one of our poets has it, "the path of duty is the way of glory," and those that "scorn delights and live laborious days," and listen not to the voices that say: "Come and enjoy this," but to the sterner voice that says, "Come and bear this"—these will "find the stubborn thistles bursting Into glossy purples that out-redden All voluptuous garden roses." So, because the road is narrow, therefore choose it. Because the other path is wide I beseech you to avoid it.

III. Note the travellers.

On the one road there are "few," on the other, by comparison, "many." That was true in Christ's time, and although the world is better since, and many feet have trodden the narrow way, and have found that it leads to life, yet I am afraid it is so still.

Now, did you ever think, or do you believe, that the fact of a course of conduct, or of an opinion, being the conduct or the opinion of a majority, is *pro tanto* against it? "What *every*body says must be true," says the old proverb, and I do not dispute it. What *most* people say is, I think, most often false. And that is true

about conduct, as well as about opinion. It is very unsafe to take the general sense of a community, for your direction. It is unsafe in regard of matters of opinion, it is even more unsafe in regard of matters of conduct. That there are many on a road is no sign that the road is a right one; but it is rather an argument the other way; looking at the gregariousness of human nature, and how much people like to save themselves the trouble of thinking and decision, and to run in ruts; just as a cab-driver will get upon the tram-lines when he can, because his vehicle runs easier.

So the fact that, if you are going to be Christlike Christians, you will be in the minority, is a reason for being such.

You young men in our Manchester warehouses, and all of you in your different spheres and circles, do not be afraid of being singular. And remember that Jesus Christ, and one man with Him, though it is *Athanasius contra mundum*, are always in the majority.

Now, that is good, bracing teaching, apart altogether from Christianity. But I wish to bring it to bear especially in that direction. And so I would remind you that after all, the solitude in which a man may have to walk, if he sets Christ before him, and tries to follow Him with His cross upon his shoulders, is only an apparent solitude. For, look, whose footsteps are these on my path, not without spots of blood, where the tender feet have come upon thorns and briars? There has been Somebody here before me. Who? "Let him take up his cross and follow *Me*." And if we follow Him, the solitude will be like that in which the two sad disciples walked on the Resurrection day,

when a third came and joined Himself to them. So a second will come to us, if we are alone, and our hearts will burn within us. Nor shall we need to wait till the repose of the evening breaking of bread, before we know that "it is the Lord"; nor, known and recognised, will He vanish from our sides.

Dear brethren, because "few there be that go in thereat," and walk thereon, I beseech *you* to go in through the door of faith, and to walk in the way of Christ, who has left us an ensample that we should follow in His steps. If of thee it can be said, as the great Puritan poet said of one virgin pure that thou

> "—Wisely hast shunned the broad way and the green,
> And with those few art eminently seen
> That labour up the hill of heavenly truth,—"

his assurance to her will be applicable to thee, and

> "—Thou, when the Bridegroom, with His feastful friends,
> Passes to bliss at the mid-hour of night,
> Hast gained thy entrance.—"

IV. That leads me to the last point—viz., the contrasted ends of these two paths.

Christ assumes the right to speak decisively and authoritatively with regard to the ultimate issues of human conduct, in a way which, as I believe, marks His divinity, and which no man can venture upon without presumption. Of the one path He declares without hesitation that it leads to life; of the other He affirms uncompromisingly that it "leads to destruction." Now, I dare not dwell upon these solemn thoughts with any enfeebling expansion by my own words, but I beseech you to lay them to heart—only take the simple remark

as a commentary and an exposition of the solemn meaning of these issues, that life does not mean mere continuous existence, but, as it generally does upon His lips, means that which alone He recognises as being the true life of such a creature as man—viz., existence in union with Himself, the Source of life; and that, conversely, destruction does not mean merely the cessation of being, or what we call the destruction of consciousness and the annihilation of a soul, but that it means the continued consciousness of a soul rent away from Him in whom alone is life, and which therefore has made shipwreck of everything, and has destroyed itself.

There are the issues, then, before us, and I dare not blur the clear distinction which Jesus Christ draws. I listen to Him, and accept His word, and I press upon you, dear brethren, that the main thing about a road is, after all, where it leads us; and I ask you to remember that your life-path—as I try to remember that mine—is tending to one or other of these two issues. The one path may be, and is, rough and steep, though its delights are nobler, more poignant, and more permanent than any that can be found elsewhere. Steadily climbing like some mountain railway, it reaches at last the short tunnel on the summit level, and then dashes out into the blinding blaze of a new sunshine. The other goes merrily enough, at first, downhill, but at last it comes to the edge of the abyss, and there *it* stops, but the traveller does not. He goes over; and nobody can see the darkness into which he falls.

Dear friends, Christ says, "I am the Way." Do you go to Him and cry, "See if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me into the way everlasting."

SLEEPING THROUGH JESUS.

". . . Them also which sleep in Jesus . . ."—1 THESS. iv. 14

THAT expression is not unusual, in various forms, in the Apostle's writings. It suggests a very tender and wonderful thought of closeness of union between our Lord and the living dead, so close as that He is, as it were, the atmosphere in which they move, or the house in which they dwell. But, tender and wonderful as that thought is, it is not exactly the Apostle's idea here. For, accurately rendered—and accuracy in regard to Scripture language is not pedantry—the words run, "them which sleep *through* Jesus."

Now, that is a strange phrase, and, I suppose, its strangeness is the reason why our translators have softened it down to the more familiar and obvious "*in* Jesus." We can understand living through Christ, or being saved through Christ, but what can *sleeping* through Christ mean? I shall hope to answer the question presently, but, in the meantime, I only wish to point out what the Apostle does say, and to plead for letting him say it, strange though it sounds. For the strange and the difficult phrases of Scripture are like the hard quartz reefs in which gold is, and if we slur them over we are likely to lose the treasure. Let us try if we can find what the gold here may be.

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Now, there are only two thoughts that I wish to dwell upon as suggested by these words. One is the softened aspect of death and of the state of the Christian dead; and the other is the ground or cause of that softened aspect.

I. First, then, the softened aspect of death, and of the state of the Christian dead.

It is to Jesus primarily that the New Testament writers owe their use of this gracious emblem of sleep. For, as you remember, the word was twice upon our Lord's lips; once when, over the twelve-years-old maid, from whom life had barely ebbed away, He said, "She is not dead, but sleepeth"; and once when in regard of the man Lazarus, from whom life had removed further, He said, "Our friend sleepeth, but I go that I may awake him out of sleep." But Jesus was not the originator of the expression. You find it in the Old Testament, where the prophet Daniel, speaking of the end of the days and the bodily resurrection, designates those who share in it as "them that sleep in the dust of the earth." And the Old Testament was not the sole origin of the phrase. For it is too natural, too much in accordance with the visibilities of death, not to have suggested itself to many hearts and been shrined in many languages. Many an inscription of Greek and Roman date speaks of death under this figure; but almost always it is with the added, deepened note of despair, that it is a sleep which knows no waking, but lasts through eternal night.

Now, the Christian thought associated with this emblem is the precise opposite of the pagan one. The pagan heart shrank from naming the ugly thing because it was so ugly. So dark and deep a dread coiled round the

man, as he contemplated it, that he sought to drape the grimness in some kind of thin, transparent veil, and to put the buffer of a word between him and its hideousness. But the Christian's motive for the use of the word is the precise opposite. He uses the gentler expression because the thing has become gentler.

It is profoundly significant that throughout the whole of the New Testament the plain, naked word "death" is usually applied, not to the physical fact which we ordinarily designate by the name, but to the grim thing of which that physical fact is only the emblem and the parable—viz., the true death which lies in the separation of the soul from God; whilst predominantly the New Testament usage calls the physical fact by some other gentler form of expression, because, as I say, the gentleness has passed over the thing to be designated.

For instance, you find one class of representations which speak of death as being a departing and a being with Christ; or which call it, as one of the Apostles does, an "exodus," where it is softened down to be merely a change of environment, a change of locality. Then another class of representations speak of it as "putting off this my tabernacle," or, the dissolution of the "earthly house"—where there is a broad, firm line of demarcation drawn between the inhabitant and the habitation, and the thing is softened down to be a mere change of dwelling. Again, another class of expressions speak of it as being an "offering," where the main idea is that of a voluntary surrender, a sacrifice or libation of myself and my life poured out upon the altar of God.

But sweetest, deepest, most appealing to all our hearts, is that emblem of my text, "them that sleep." It is

used, if I count rightly, some fourteen times in the New Testament, and it carries with it large and plain lessons, on which I touch but for a moment. What, then, does this metaphor say to us?

Well, it speaks first of rest. That is not altogether an attractive conception to some of us. If it be taken exclusively it is by no means wholesome. I suppose that the young, and the strong, and the eager, and the ambitious, and the prosperous rather shrink from the notion of their activities being stiffened into slumber. But, dear friends, there are some of us like tired children in a fair, who would fain have done with the weariness, who have made experience of the distractions and bewildering changes, whose backs are stiffened with toil, whose hearts are heavy with loss. And to all of us, in some moods, the prospect of shuffling off this weary coil of responsibilities and duties and tasks and sorrows, and of passing into indisturbance and repose, appeals. I believe, for my part, that, after all, the deepest longing of men—though they search for it through toil and effort—is for repose. As the poet has taught us, "there is no joy but calm." Every heart is weary enough, and heavy laden, and labouring enough, to feel the sweetness of a promise of rest:—

> Sleep, full of rest from head to foot,
> Lie still, dry dust, secure of change.

Yes! but the rest of which our emblem speaks is, as I believe, only applicable to the bodily frame. The word "sleep" is a transcript of what sense enlightened by faith sees in that still form, with the folded hands and the quiet face and the closed eyes. But let us remember

that this repose, deep and blessed as it is, is not, as some would say, the repose of unconsciousness. I do not believe, and I would have you not believe, that this emblem refers to the vigorous, spiritual life, or that the passage from out of the toil and moil of earth into the calm of the darkness beyond has any power in limiting or suspending the vital force of the man.

Why, the very metaphor itself tells us that the sleeper is not unconscious. He is parted from the outer world, he is unaware of externals. When Stephen knelt below the old wall, and was surrounded by howling fanatics that slew him, one moment he was gashed with stones and tortured, and the next "he fell on sleep." They might howl, and the stones fly as they would, and he was all unaware of it. Like Jonah sleeping in the hold, what mattered the roaring of the storm to him? But separation from externals does not mean suspense of life or of consciousness, and the slumberer often dreams, and is aware of himself persistently throughout his slumber. Nay! some of his faculties are set at liberty to work more energetically, because his connection with the outer world is for the time suspended.

And so I say that what on the hither side is sleep, on the further side is awaking, and that the complex whole of the condition of the sainted dead may be described with equal truth by either metaphor; "they sleep in Jesus"; or, "when I awake I shall be satisfied with Thy likeness."

Scripture, as it seems to me, distinctly carries this limitation of the emblem. For what does it mean when the Apostle says that to depart and to be with Christ is far better? Surely he that thus spoke conceived that

these two things were contemporaneous, the departing and the being with Him. And surely he who thus spoke could not have conceived that a millennium-long parenthesis of slumberous unconsciousness was to intervene between the moment of his decease and the moment of his fellowship with Jesus. How could a man prefer that dormant state to the state here, of working for and living with the Lord? Surely, being with Him must mean that we know where we are, and who is our Companion.

And what does that text mean: "Ye are come unto the spirits of just men made perfect," unless it means that of these two classes of persons who are thus regarded as brought into living fellowship, each is aware of the other? Does perfecting of the spirit mean the smiting of the spirit into unconsciousness? Surely not, and surely in view of such words as these, we must recognise the fact that, however limited and imperfect may be the present connection of the disembodied dead, who sleep in Christ, with external things—they know themselves, they know their home and their Companion, and they know the blessedness in which they are lapped.

But another thought which is suggested by this emblem is, as I have already said, most certainly the idea of awaking. The pagans said, as indeed one of their poets has it, "Suns can sink and return, but for us, when our brief light sinks, there is but one perpetual night of slumber." The Christian idea of death is that it is transitory as a sleep in the morning, and sure to end. As St. Augustine says somewhere, "wherefore are they called sleepers, but because in the day of the Lord they will be reawakened?"

And so these are the thoughts, very imperfectly spoken, I know, which spring like flowers from this gracious metaphor "them that sleep"—rest and awaking; rest and consciousness.

II. Note the ground of this softened aspect.

They "sleep through Him." It is by reason of Christ and His work, and by reason of that alone, that death's darkness is made beautiful, and death's grimness is softened down to this. Now, in order to grasp the full meaning of such words as these of the Apostle, we must draw a broad distinction between the physical fact of the ending of corporeal life and the mental condition which is associated with it by us. What we call death, if I may so say, is a complex thing—a bodily phenomenon *plus* conscience, the sense of sin, the certainty of retribution in the dim beyond. And you have to take these two apart. The former remains, but if the other is removed, the whole has changed its character and is become another thing, and a very little thing.

The mere physical fact is a trifle. Look at it as you see it in the animals; look at it as you see it in men when they actually come to it. In ninety-nine cases out of a hundred it is painless and easy, and men sink into slumber. Strange, is it not, that so small a reality should have power to cast over human life so immense and obscuring a shadow? Why? Because, as the Apostle says, "the sting of death is sin," and if you can take the sting out of it, then there is very little to fear, and it comes down to be an insignificant and transient element in our experience.

Now, the death of Jesus Christ takes away, if I may so say, the *nimbus* of apprehension and dread

arising from conscience and sin, and the forecast of retribution. There is nothing left for us to face except the physical fact, and any rough soldier, with a coarse, red coat upon him, will face that for eighteenpence a day, and think himself well paid. Jesus Christ has abolished death, leaving the mere shell, but taking all the substance out of it. It has become a different thing to men, because in that death of His He has exhausted the bitterness, and has made it possible that we should pass into the shadow, and not fear either conscience or sin or judgment.

In this connection I cannot but notice with what a profound meaning the Apostle, in this very verse, uses the bare, naked word in reference to Him and the softened one in reference to us. "If we believe that Jesus Christ *died* and rose again, even so them also which sleep." Ah! yes! He died indeed, bearing all that terror with which men's consciences have invested death. He died indeed, bearing on Himself the sins of the world. He died that no man henceforward need ever die in that same fashion. His death makes our deaths sleep, and His resurrection makes our sleep calmly certain of a waking.

So, dear "brethren, I would not have you ignorant concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not even as others which have no hope." And I would have you to remember that, whilst Christ by His work has made it possible that the terror may pass away, and death may be softened and minimised into slumber, it will not be so with you—unless you are joined to Him, and by trust in the power of His death, and the overflowing might of His resurrection, have made sure that

what He has passed through, you will pass through, and where He is, and what He is, you will be also.

Two men die by one railway accident, sitting side by side upon one seat, smashed in one collision. But though the outward fact is the same about each, the reality of their deaths is infinitely different. The one falls asleep through Jesus, in Jesus, the other dies indeed, and the death of his body is only a feeble shadow of the death of his spirit. Do you knit yourself to the Life, which is Christ, and then "he that believeth on Me shall never die."

THE HEATH IN THE DESERT AND THE TREE BY THE RIVER.

"He shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh; but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, a salt land and not inhabited. . . . He shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit."—JER. xvii. 6, 8.

THE prophet here puts before us two highly-finished pictures. In the one, the hot desert stretches on all sides. The fierce "sunbeams like swords" slay every green thing. The salt particles in the soil glitter in the light. No living creature breaks the melancholy solitude. It is a "waste land where no one came, or hath come since the making of the world." Here and there a stunted, grey, prickly shrub struggles to live, and just manages not to die. But it has no grace of leaf, nor profitableness of fruit; and it only serves to make the desolation more desolate.

The other carries us to some brimming river, where everything lives because water has come. The pictures are coloured by Eastern experience. For in those lands more than beneath our humid skies and weaker sunshine, the presence or absence of running water makes the difference between barrenness and fertility. Dipping their boughs in the sparkling current, and driving their

roots through the moist soil, the bordering trees lift aloft their pride of foliage and bear fruits in their season.

So, says Jeremiah, the two pictures represent two sets of men; the one, he who diverts from their true object his heart-capacities of love and trust, and clings to creatures and to men, "making flesh his arm and departing from the living God"; the other, he who leans the whole weight of his needs and cares and sins and sorrows upon God. We can make the choice which shall be the object of our trust, and according as we choose the one or the other, the experience of these vivid pictures will be ours.

Let me, briefly, then, draw out the points of contrast in these two companion sketches.

I. The one is in the desert, the other by the river.

Underneath the passage there lies this thought, that the direction of a man's trust determines the whole cast of his life, because it determines, as it were, the soil in which he grows. We can alter our *habitat.* The plant is fixed; but "I saw men as trees"—yes! but as "trees *walking*." We can walk, and can settle where we shall be rooted and whence we shall draw our inspiration, our confidence, our security. The man that chooses —for it is a matter of choice—to trust in any creature thereby wills, though he does not know it, that he shall dwell in a "salt land and not inhabited." The man that chooses to cast his whole self into the arms of God, and in a paroxysm of self-distrust to realise the Divine helpfulness and presence, that man will soon know that he is planted by the river.

Now, the poor, little, dusty shrub in the desert, whose very leaves have been modified into prickles, is fit for

the desert, and is as much at home there, as the willow by the water-courses with their lush vegetation in their moist bed. But if a *man* makes that fatal choice which so many of us are making, of shutting out God from his confidence and his love, and squandering these upon earth and upon creatures, he is as fatally out of harmony with the place which he has chosen for himself, and as much away from his natural soil as a tropical plant would be amongst the snows of Arctic glaciers, or a water lily in the Sahara.

Considering all that I am and need, what and where is my true home, and the soil in which I can grow securely, and fear no evil? Brethren, there is only one answer to that question. The very make of a man's spirit points to God, and to God alone, as the natural place for him to root and grow in. You, I, the poorest and humblest of men, will never be right, never feel that we are in our native soil, and compassed with the appropriate surroundings, until we have laid our hearts and our hands on the breast of God, and rested ourselves on Him. Not more surely do gills and fins proclaim that the creature that has them is meant to roam through the boundless ocean, nor the anatomy and wings of the bird witness more plainly to its destination to soar in the open heavens, than the make of your spirits testifies that God, none less or lower, is your portion. We are built for God, and unless we recognise and act upon that conviction, we are like the prickly shrub in the desert, whatever good may be around us; and, if we recognise and act upon it, whatever parched ground may seem to stretch on all sides, there will be soil below moist enough for us to draw refreshment and vitality from it.

If that be so, brethren, what insanity the lives of multitudes of us is! As well might bees try to get honey from a vase of wax flowers as we to draw what we need from creatures, from ourselves, from visible and material things.

What would you business-men think of somebody that went and sold out all his stock of Government or other sound securities, and then pitched the proceeds down a hole in South Africa, out of which no gold will ever come? He is about as wise as the people that fancy that these hearts of theirs will ever be at home except they find a home in God.

Where else will you get love that will never fail, nor change, nor die? Where else will you find an object for the intellect that will yield inexhaustible material of contemplation and delight? Where else infallible direction for the will? Where else shall weakness find unfailing strength, or sorrow, adequate consolation, or hope, certain fulfilment, or fear, a safe hiding-place? Nowhere besides. Oh! then, brethren, do, I beseech you, turn away your heart's confidence and love from earth and creatures; for until the roots of your life go down into God, and you draw your life from Him, you are not in your right soil.

II. The one can take in no real good; the other can fear no evil.

One verse of our text says, "He shall not see when good cometh"; the other one, according to our Authorised Version, "He shall not see when heat cometh." But a very slight alteration of one word in the original gives a better reading, which is adopted in the Revised Version, where we have "and shall not fear when heat

cometh." That alteration is obviously correct, because there follows immediately a parallel clause, "and shall not be careful"—or anxious—"in the year of drought." In both these clauses the metaphor of the tree is a little let go; and the man who is signified by it comes rather more to the front than in the remainder of the picture. But that is quite natural.

So look at these two simple thoughts for a moment. He whose trust is set upon creatures is thereby disabled from recognising what is his highest good. His judgment is perverted. *There* is the explanation of the fact that men are contented with the partial and evanescent blessedness that may be drawn from human loves and companionship and material things. It is because they have gone blind, and the false direction of their confidence has put out their eyes. And if any of my hearers are living careless about God, and all that comes from Him, and perfectly contented with that which they find in this visible, diurnal sphere, that is not because they have the good they need, but because they do not know that good when they see it; and have lost the power of discerning what is really for their benefit and blessedness.

There is nothing sadder in this world than the conspiracy into which men seem to have entered, to ignore the highest good, and to profess themselves contented with the lowest. I remember a rough parable of Luther's—the roughness of which may be pardoned for the force and vividness of it—which bears on this matter. He tells how a company of swine were offered all manner of dainty and refined foods, and how, with a unanimous swinish grunt, they answered that they preferred the

warm, reeking "grains" from the mash-tub. The illustration is coarse, but it is not an unfair representation of the choice that some of us are making.

"He cannot see when good cometh." God comes, and I would rather have some more money. God comes, and I prefer some woman's love. God comes, and I would rather have a prosperous business. God comes, and I prefer beer. So I might go the whole round. The man that cannot see good when it is there before his face, because the false direction of his confidence has blinded his eyes, cannot open his heart to it. It comes, but it does not come *in*. It surrounds him, but it does not enter into him. You are plunged, as it were, in a sea of possible felicity, which will be yours if your heart's direction is towards God, and the surrounding ocean of blessedness has as little power to fill your heart, as the sea to enter some hermetically sealed flask, dropped into the middle of the Atlantic. "He cannot see when good cometh." Blind, blind, blind! are multitudes of us.

Turn to the other side. "He shall not fear when heat cometh," which is evil in those Eastern lands, "and shall not be careful in the year of drought." The tree, that sends its roots towards a river that never fails, does not suffer when all the land is parched. The man who has driven his roots into God, and is drawing from that deep source what is needful for his life and fertility, has no occasion to dread any evil, nor to gnaw his heart with anxiety as to what he is to do in parched days. Troubles may come, but they do not go deeper than the surface. It may be all cracked and caked and dry, "a thirsty land where no water is," and yet deep down there may be moisture and coolness.

Faith, which is trust, and fear are opposite poles. If a man has the one, he can scarcely have the other in vigorous operation. He that has his trust set upon God does not need to dread anything except the weakening or the paralysing of that trust; for so long as it lasts it is a talisman which changes evil into good, the true philosopher's stone which transmutes the baser metals into gold; and, so long as it lasts, God's shield is round him and no evil can befall him.

Brethren, if our trust is in God, it is unworthy of it and of us to fear, for all things are His, and there is no evil in evil as men call it, so long as it does not draw away our hearts from our Father and our Hope. Therefore, he that fears let him trust; he that trusts let him not be afraid. He that sets his heart and anchors his hopes of safety on any except God, let him be afraid, for he is in a very stern world, and if he is not fearful he is a fool.

So the direction of our trust, if it is right, shuts all real evil out from us, and if it is wrong, shuts us out from all real good.

III. The one is bare, the other clothed with the beauty of foliage.

The word which is translated "heat" has a close connection with, if it does not literally mean, "naked," or "bare." Probably, as I have said, it designates some inconspicuously-leaved desert shrub, the particular species not being ascertainable or a matter of any consequence. Leaves, in Scripture, have a recognised symbolical meaning. "Nothing but leaves" in the story of the fig-tree meant only beautiful outward appearance, with no corresponding outcome of goodness

of heart, in the shape of fruit. So I may venture, here, to draw a distinction between leafage and fruit, and say that the one points rather to a man's character and conduct as being lovely in appearance and in the other as being morally good and profitable.

This is the lesson of these two clauses—Misdirected confidence in creatures strips a man of much beauty of character, and true faith in God adorns a soul with a leafy vesture of loveliness. Now, I have no doubt that there start up in your minds at once two objections to that statement; first, that a great many godless men do present fair and attractive features of character; and, secondly, that a great many Christian men do not. I admit both things frankly, and yet I say that, for the highest good, the perfect crowning beauty of any human character this is needed, that it should cling to God. "Whatsoever things are lovely, and of good report" lack their supreme excellence, the diamond on the top of the royal crown, the glittering gold on the summit of the campanile, unless there is in them a distinct reference to God.

I believe that I am speaking to some who would not profess themselves to be religious men, and who yet are truly desirous of cultivating in their character the Fair and the Good. To them I would venture to say—brethren, you will never be so completely, so refinedly, so truly graceful as you might be, unless the roots of your character "are hid with Christ in God."

> "—A servant with this clause
> Makes drudgery divine,—"

said good old George Herbert. And any act, however

humble, on which the light from God falls will gleam with a lustre else unattainable, like some piece of broken glass in the furrows of a ploughed field.

Sure I am that if we Christian people had a deeper faith, we should have fairer lives. And I beseech you, my fellow-believers in Jesus Christ, not to supply the other side with arguments against Christianity, by showing that it is possible for a man to say and to suppose that he sets his heart on God, and yet to bear but little leafage of beauty or grace of character. Goodness is beauty; beauty is goodness. Both are to be secured by communion and union with Him who is fairer than the children of men. Dip your roots into the fountain of life—it is the fountain of beauty as well as of life, and your lives will be green.

IV. Lastly, the one is sterile ; the other fruitful.

I admit, as before, that this principle often seems to be contradicted, both by the good works of godless men, and by the bad works of godly ones. But for all that, I would urge you to consider that the only works of men worth calling "fruit," if regard is had to their capacities, relations, and obligations, are those done as the outcome and consequence of hearts trusting in the Lord. The rest of the man's activities may be busy and multiplied, and, from the point of view of a godless morality, many may be fair and good; but if we think of him as being destined, as his chief end, "to glorify God, and (so) to enjoy Him for ever," what correspondence between such a creature and acts that are done without reference to God can there ever be? They are not worth calling fruit. At the most they are "wild grapes," and there comes a time when they will be tested and the

axe laid to the root of the trees, and these imperfect deeds will shrivel up and disappear.

Trust will certainly be fruitful. In so saying we are upon Christian ground, which declares that the outcome of faith is conduct in conformity with the will of Him in whom we trust, and that the productive principle of all good in man is confidence in God manifest to us in Jesus Christ.

So we have not to begin with work; we have to begin with character. Make the tree good, and its fruit will be good. Faith will give power to bring forth such fruit; and faith will set agoing the motive of love which will produce it.

Thus, dear brethren, we come back to this—the prime thing about a man is the direction which his trust takes. Is it to God? Then the tree is good; and its fruit will be good too. If you will trust yourselves to God manifest in the flesh, to Jesus Christ, and His work for you and in you, then you will be as if planted by the river of water, you will be able to receive into yourselves, and will receive, all good, and be masters of all evil, will exhibit graces of character else impossible, and will bring forth fruit that shall remain. Separated from Him we are nothing, and can bring forth nothing that shall stand the light of that last moment.

Brother, turn your trust to that dear Lord, and then you will have your fruit unto holiness, and the end shall be everlasting life, when the transplanting season comes, and they that have been planted in the house of the Lord below shall flourish in the courts of our God above, and grow more green and fruitful, beside the river of the water of life that proceedeth from the throne of God and of the Lamb.

BARTIMÆUS.

". . . Blind Bartimæus, the son of Timæus, sat by the highway side begging."—MARK x. 46.

THE narrative of this miracle is contained in all the three first gospels, but the accounts differ in two respects—as to the number of men restored to sight, and as to the scene of the miracle. Matthew tells us that there were two men healed and agrees with Mark in placing the miracle as Jesus was leaving Jericho. Mark says there was one, and that the place was outside the gate in departing. Luke, on the other hand, agrees with Matthew as to the number, and differs from him and Mark as to the place, which he sets at the entrance into the city. The first of these two discrepancies may very easily be put aside. The greater includes the less; silence is not contradiction. To say that there was *one* does not deny that there were *two*. And if Bartimæus was a Christian, and known to Mark's readers, as is probable from the mention of his name, it is easily intelligible how he, being also the chief actor and spokesman, should have had Mark's attention concentrated on him. As to the other discrepancy, many attempts have been made to remove it. None of them are altogether satisfactory. But what does it matter? The apparent contradiction may affect

theories as to the characteristics of inspired books, but it has nothing to do with the credibility of the narratives, or with their value for us.

Mark's account is evidently that of an eye-witness. It is full of little particulars which testify thereto. Whether Bartimæus had a companion or not, he was obviously the chief actor and spokesman. And the whole story seems to me to lend itself to the enforcement of some very important lessons, which I will try to draw from it.

I. Notice the beggar's petition and the attempts to silence it.

Remember that Jesus was now on His last journey to Jerusalem. That night He would sleep at Bethany: Calvary was but a week off. He had paused to save Zacchæus, and now He has resumed His march to His cross. Popular enthusiasm is surging round Him, and for the first time He does not try to repress it. A shouting multitude are escorting Him out of the city. They have just passed the gates, and are in the act of turning towards the mountain gorge through which ran the Jerusalem road. A long file of beggars is sitting, as beggars do still in Eastern cities, outside the gate; well accustomed to lift their monotonous wail at the sound of passing footsteps. Bartimæus is amongst them. He asks, according to Luke, what is the cause of the bustle, and is told that "Jesus of Nazareth is passing by." The name wakes strange hopes in him, which can only be accounted for by his knowledge of Christ's miracles done elsewhere. It is a witness to their notoriety that they had filtered down to be the talk of beggars at city gates. And so, true

to his trade, he cries "Jesus . . . have mercy upon me!"

Now, note two or three things about that cry. The first is the clear insight into Christ's place and dignity. The multitude said to him: "Jesus *of Nazareth* passeth by." That was all they cared for or knew. He cried, "Jesus, thou *Son of David*," distinctly recognising our Lord's Messianic character, His power and authority, and on that power and authority he built a confidence; for he says—not as some other suppliants had done, either "If Thou wilt Thou canst," or "If Thou canst do anything, have compassion on us." He is sure of both the power and the will.

Now, it is interesting to notice that this same clear insight other blind men in the evangelist's story are also represented as having had. Blindness has its compensations. It leads to a certain steadfast brooding upon thoughts, free from disturbing influences. Seeing Jesus did not work faith; not seeing Him seems to have helped it. It left imagination to work undisturbed, and He was all the loftier to these blind men, because the conceptions of their minds were not limited by the vision of their eyes. At all events, here is a distinct piece of insight into Christ's dignity, power, and will, to which the seeing multitudes were blind.

Note, further, how in the cry there throbs the sense of need, deep and urgent. And note how in it there is also the realisation of the possibility that the widely-flowing blessings of which Bartimæus had heard might be concentrated and poured, in their full flood, upon himself. He individualises himself, *his* need, Christ's power and willingness to help *him*. And, because he

has heard of so many who have, in like manner, received His healing touch, he comes with the cry, "Have mercy upon *me*."

All this is upon the low level of physical blessings needed and desired. But let us lift it higher. It is a mirror in which we may see ourselves, our necessities, and the example of what our desire ought to be. Ah! brethren, the deep consciousness of impotence, need, emptiness, blindness, lies at the bottom of all true crying to Jesus Christ. If you have never gone to Jesus Christ knowing yourself to be a sinful man, in peril, present and future, from your sin, and stained and marred by reason of it, you never have gone to Him in any deep and adequate sense at all. Only when I thus know myself am I driven to cry "Jesus! have mercy on me." And I ask you not to answer to me, but to press the question on your own consciences—"have I any experience of such a sense of need; or am I groping in the darkness and saying, I see; weak as water, and saying I am strong?" "Thou knowest not that thou art poor, and naked, and blind"; and so that Jesus of Nazareth should be passing by has never moved thy tongue to call, "Son of David! have mercy upon me."

Again, this man's cry expressed a clear insight into something at least of our Lord's unique character and power. Brethren, unless we know Him to be all that is involved in that august title, "the Son of David," I do not think our cries to Him will ever be very earnest. It seems to me that they will only be so when, on the one hand, we recognise our need of a Saviour, and, on the other hand, behold in Him the Saviour that we need.

I can quite understand—and we may see plenty of illustrations of it all round us—a kind of Christianity, real as far as it goes, but in my judgment very superficial, which has no adequate conception of what sin means, in its depth, in its power upon the victim of it, or in its consequences here and hereafter; and, that sense being lacking, the whole scale of Christianity, as it were, is dropped, and Christ comes to be, not, as I think the New Testament tells us He is, the Incarnate Word of God, who for us men and for our salvation bore our sins in His own body on the tree, and was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him, but an Example, a Teacher, or a pure Model, or a social Reformer, or the like. If men think of Him only as such, they will never cry to Him, "Have mercy upon me."

Dear friends, I pray you, whether you begin with looking into your own hearts and recognising the crawling evils that have made their home there, and thence pass to the thought of the sort of Redeemer that you need and find in Christ—or whether you begin at the other side, and, looking upon the revealed Christ in all the fulness in which He is represented to us in the gospels, from thence go back to ask yourselves the question, "What sort of man must I be, if that is the kind of Saviour that I need?"—I pray you ever to blend these two things together, the consciousness of your own need of redemption in His blood, and the assurance that by His death we are redeemed, and then to cry, "Lord! have mercy upon *me*," and claim your individual share in the wide-flowing blessing, to turn all the generalities of His grace into the particulars of your own possession

of it. We have to go one by one to His cross, and one by one to pass through the wicket gate. We have not cried to Him as we ought, if our cry is only "Christ! have mercy upon us. Lord! have mercy upon us. Christ! have mercy upon us." We must be alone with Him, that into our own hearts we may receive all the fulness of His blessing; and our petition must be "Thou Son of David! have mercy upon *me*." Have you said that?

Notice, further, the attempts to stifle the cry. No doubt it was in defence of the Master's dignity, as they construed it, that the people sought to silence the persistent, strident voice piercing through their hosannas. Ah! they did not know that the cry of wretchedness was far sweeter to Him than their shallow hallelujahs. Christian people of all churches, and of some stiffened churches very especially, have been a great deal more careful of Christ's dignity than He is, and have felt that their formal worship was indecorously disturbed, when by chance some earnest voice forced its way through it with the cry of need and desire. But this man had been accustomed for many a day, sitting outside the gate, to reiterate his petition when it was unattended to, and to make it heard amidst the noise of passers-by. So he was persistently bold and importunate and shameless, as the shallow critics thought, in his crying. The more they silenced him, the more a great deal he cried. Would God that we had more crying like that; and that Christ's servants did not so often seek to suppress it, as some of them do! If there are any of you, who, by reason of companions, or cares, or habits, or sorrows, or a feeble conception of your own need or a doubtful recognition of Christ's power and mercy, have been tempted to

stop your supplications, do like Bartimæus, and the more these, your enemies, seek to silence the deepest voice that is in you, the more let it speak.

II. So, notice Christ's call and the suppliant's response. "He stood still, and commanded him to be called." Remember that He was on His road to His cross, and the tension of spirit which the Evangelists notice as attaching to Him then, and which filled the disciples with awe as they followed Him, absorbed Him, no doubt, at this hour, so that He heard but little of the people's shouts. But He did hear the blind beggar's cry, and He arrested His march in order to attend to it.

Now, dear friends, I am not merely twisting a Biblical incident round to an interpretation which it does not bear, but am stating a plain un-rhetorical truth when I say that it is so to-night. Jesus Christ is no dead Christ who is to be remembered only. He is a living Christ who, at this moment, is all that He ever was, and is doing in loftier fashion all the gracious things that He did upon earth. That pause of the King is repeated now, and the quick ear which discerned the difference between the unreal shouts of the crowd, and the agony of sincerity in the cry of the beggar, is still open. He is in the heavens, surrounded by its glories, and, as I think Scripture teaches us, wielding providence and administering the affairs of the universe. He does not need to pause in order to hear you and me. If He did, He would —if I may venture upon such an impossible supposition —bid the hallelujahs of heaven hush themselves, and suspend the operations of His providence if need were, rather than that you or I, or any poor man who cries to Him, should be unheard and unhelped. The living Christ

is as tender a friend, has as quick an ear, is as ready to help at once, to-day, as He was when outside the gate of Jericho; and every one of us may lift his or her poor, thin voice, and it will go straight up to the throne, and not be lost in the clamour of the hallelujahs that echo round His seat. Christ still hears and answers the cry of need. Send you it up, and you will find that true.

Notice the suppliant's response. That is a very characteristic right-about-face of the crowd, who one moment were saying, "Hold your tongue and do not disturb Him," and the next moment were all eager to encumber him with help, and to say "Rise up! be of good cheer; He calleth thee." No thanks to them that He did. And what did the man do? "Sprang to his feet"—as the word rightly rendered would be—and flung away the frouzy rags that he had wrapped round him for warmth and softness of seat, as he waited at the gate; "and he came to Jesus." Brethren, "casting aside every weight and the sin that doth so easily beset us; let us run" to the same refuge. You have to abandon something if you are to go to Christ to be healed. I daresay you know well enough what it is. I do not; but certainly there is something that entangles your legs and keeps you from finding your way to Him. If there is nothing else there is yourself and your trust in self, and that is to be put away. Cast away the garment spotted with the flesh and go to Christ, and you will receive succour.

III. Next, the question of all-granting love, and the answer of conscious need.

"What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?" A very few hours before He had put the same question with an entirely different significance, when the sons of Zebedee

came to Him, and tried to get Him to walk blindfold into a promise. He upset their scheme with the simple question "What is it that you want?" which meant, "I must know and judge before I commit Myself." But when He said the same thing to Bartimæus He meant exactly the opposite. It was putting the key of the treasure-house into the beggar's hand. It was the implicit pledge that whatever he desired he should receive. He knew that the thing this man wanted was the thing that He delighted to give.

But the tenderness of these words, and the gracious promise that is hived in them, must not make us forget the singular authority that speaks in them. Think of a man doing as Jesus Christ did—standing before another and saying, "I will give you anything that you want." He must be either a madman, or a blasphemer, or "God manifest in the flesh"; Almighty power guided by infinite love.

And what said the man? He had no doubt what he wanted most—the opening of these blind eyes of his. And, dear brother, if we knew ourselves as well as Bartimæus knew his blindness, we should have as little doubt what it is that we need most. Suppose you had this wishing-cap that Christ put on Bartimæus's head put on yours: what would you ask? It is a penetrating question, if men will answer it honestly. Think what you consider to be your chief need. Suppose Jesus Christ stood where I stand, and spoke to you: "What wilt thou that I should do for you?" If you are a wise man, if you know yourself and Him, your answer will come as swiftly as the beggar's—Lord! heal me of my blindness, and take away my sin, and give me Thy salvation. There is no

doubt about what it is that every one of us needs most. And there should be no doubt as to what each of us would ask first.

The supposition that I have been making is realised. That gracious Lord is here, and is ready to give you the satisfaction of your deepest need, if you know what it is, and will go to Him for it. "Ask! and ye shall receive."

IV. Lastly, notice, sight given, and the giver following.

Bartimæus had scarcely ended speaking when Christ began. He was blind at the beginning of Christ's little sentence; he saw at the end of it. "Go thy way; thy faith hath saved thee." The answer came instantly, and the cure was as immediate as the movement of Christ's heart in answer.

I am here to-night to proclaim the possibility of an immediate passage from darkness to light. Some folk look askance at us when we talk about sudden conversions, but these are perfectly reasonable; and the experience of thousands asserts that they are actual. As soon as we desire we have, and as soon as we have, we see. Whenever the lungs are opened the air rushes in; sometimes the air opens the lungs that it may. The desire is all but contemporaneous with the fulfilment, in Christ's dealing with men. The message is flashed along the wire from earth to heaven, in an incalculably brief space of time, and the answer comes, swift as thought and swifter than light. So, dear friends, there is no reason whatever why a similar instantaneous change should not pass over some in this chapel now. You have come in unsaved; you may go out saved. It is for yourself to settle whether you do or do not.

Here we have a clear statement of the path by which Christ's mercy rushes into a man's soul. "Thy faith hath saved thee." But it was Christ's power that saved him. Yes, it was; but it was faith that made it possible for Christ's power to make him whole. Physical miracles indeed did not always require trust in Christ, as a preceding condition, but the possession of Christ's salvation does, and cannot but do. There must be trust in Him, in order that we may partake of the salvation which is owing solely to His power, His love, His work upon the cross. The condition is for us; the power comes from Him. My faith is the hand that grasps His; it is His hand, not mine, that holds me up. My faith lays hold of the rope; it is the rope and the Person above that holds it, that lift me out of the horrible pit and the miry clay. My faith flees for refuge to the city; it is the city that keeps me safe from the avenger of blood. Brother! exercise that faith, and you will receive better vision.

Now, all this story should be the story of each one of us. One modification we have to make upon it, for we do not need to cry persistently for mercy, but to trust in, and to take, the mercy that is needed. One other difference there is between Bartimæus and many of my hearers. He knew what he needed, and some of you do not. But Christ is calling us all, and my business now is to say to each of you what the crowd said to the beggar, "Rise! be of good cheer; He calleth thee." If you will fling away your hindrances, and grope your path to His feet, and fall down before Him, knowing your deep necessity, and trusting to Him to supply it, He will save you. Your new sight will gaze upon your Redeemer,

and you will follow Him in the way of loving trust and glad obedience.

Jesus Christ was passing by. He was never to be in Jericho any more. If Bartimæus did not get his sight then, he would be blind all his days. Christ and His salvation are offered to thee, my brother, now. Perhaps if you let Him pass, you will never hear Him call again, and may abide in the darkness for ever. Do not run the risk of such a fate.

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BETHESDA, THE HOUSE OF MERCY.

"Now there is at Jerusalem by the sheep-market a pool, which is called in the Hebrew tongue 'Bethesda,' having five porches. In these lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water."—JOHN v. 2, 3.

OUR Lord's miracles may be looked at from three points of view. They are proofs of His mission—a view which, though much discredited at present, is perfectly valid; they are revelations of His heart; they are parables of His work. He has set us the example of regarding them from that last point of view. For instance, in this gospel, His discourse about Himself as the Bread of Life is His commentary on the feeding of the thousands; and He appends to one of His miracles of giving sight to the blind, the sad statement that He was come into the world "that they which see not might see, and that they which see might be made blind." I venture to apply that method, and to take that point of view, in dealing with this miracle.

You know the details. We can picture to ourselves the sad crowd gathered in the ample porticoes, and presenting all the varieties of chronic impotence: "Blind, lame, withered." We see the intermittent spring in the midst, and the eager rush down the narrow steps when it bubbled up. We know how long this man had lain

there, and how hope had died down, and yet he lay, having before him the insoluble problem that, in order to be well he must do what he could only do if he were well—viz., rise and walk. We know the question that the Master put, seemingly superfluous, almost grating upon the sufferer's ear: "Wilt thou be made whole?" as if he had lain there for eight-and-thirty years for anything else! And we remember the apparently impossible command, "Arise, take up thy bed and walk," in the effort to obey which the healing came.

Now, I venture to take this story from the point of view which I have already mentioned, and to look upon it as being a parable or symbol in the material region of principles that belong to the spiritual order.

I. I ask you to look, first, at that sad, sick crowd.

There was gathered a "great multitude of impotent folk, blind, halt, withered." That is a parable of humanity, looked at from the highest point of view, and considered in the deepest reality of their condition. People talk about the gloomy views that Christianity takes of mankind. The question is not whether the views are gloomy, but whether they are true. Whilst I thankfully recognise all the abundant flood of joys and blessings which God pours upon mankind, and recognise to the full the manifold—and some of them noble—activities which fill the lives of men; still I go back to this picture and say that, beneath all these there lie, in every human experience, facts corresponding to the symbol of my text. For, after all, brother, it is a sad world that we live in; and every man's life, as we all know, and, as it is the commonplace of disappointed

cynics to say bitterly at the end, "is vanity," if it is separated from God.

I ask you to go into the depths of your own hearts and to be honest in recalling your own experience, and to say if, notwithstanding all the gladness of a godless life, there does not lie, grim and silent for the most part, but there, and felt to be there all the same, a great yearning and consciousness of unrest. It seems to me that the alternative for us all, is, will you have central gladness and surface trouble, which is what the world brings to a man that loves God and does His will, or will you have surface gladness and central sorrow?

For every good has in it some fatal flaw and incompleteness. There is always a break in the circle; always a stone missing out of the bracelet. There is always one unlighted window in the Aladdin's palace. There is always a Mordecai sitting dark as a thunder-cloud and unparticipant of the common emotion, who makes Haman say, "All this availeth nothing." There is always disappointment in earthly fruition. The fish never proves so big when it is lying panting on the grass as it did in the water, when the fisher was struggling with it. The chase is always better than the capture. In all earthly good there is a fatal disproportion between it and the heart that seeks to solace itself with it; so that after all satisfactions there is the old cry of the heart, "I hunger still." And, above all, there is the certainty which pushes itself in—like the skeleton at the feasts of the Egyptian kings, or the mocking slave that walked behind the conqueror in his triumph as he went up the steps of the Capitol—the

certainty that we have to leave them all behind us. And what is the naked soul going to do when it "flares forth into the dark"?

The world is a sad world, brother; but that is not the deepest thought about it. There is a far graver thing, of which that crowd of cripples is the symbol. There is a more tragic word to be said about the condition of universal humanity than that it lacks perfect and continual joy. Men are sinners, and therefore they are sorrowful. The diseases of these people at Bethesda were all, as I said, chronic impotence of certain faculties. They were blind, lame, and withered. Again, I appeal to conscience. Are there not in all of us powers that are dormant and all but dead? Are not our eyes blind to the realities of the universe, blind as moles to the light? Are not our feet lamed to run in the way of righteousness and of all heroic and noble life? Are we not smitten with a paralysis in regard to much that is good, which co-exists with a feverish activity in regard of much that is evil?

The disease is universal, brethren. God knows I do not want to exaggerate. I should gain nothing thereby, because your own consciousness would not respond. I do not charge you with gross sins. No doubt you are respectable people, most of you, and have kept well within the laws of the land. I have no doubt there are some outcasts here, men who have not only been sinful, but criminal; men whose lives the average morality of the world condemns. But that is not true about most of us. But this is true about us all, that we have lived to ourselves, that we have taken our own wills instead of God's will as our direction; that "the God in whose

hand our breath is, and whose are all our ways, we have not glorified." Is that true or is it not? Do not let us lose ourselves in generalities about universal sinfulness. I am trying, dear friends, to deal with you as if you and I were alone, and to get at each man, God helping me. I come to you, old and young, rich and poor, cultivated and ignorant, respectable and criminal, and say to each what I say to myself, Thou art the man: Thou art the woman. Sin is a universal disease. Humanity is bound in one because it has the great gift of speech, the great gift of consciousness, the great gift of will. And it is bound in one, because all of us are in these porches, and among the multitude of impotent folk gathered there. As when boils and blains broke out in Egypt when Moses tossed the dust in the air, the blain is there on every skin, whether of Pharaoh or the slave grinding at the millstone, or the outcast on the dunghill.

And, then, this disease is unconscious. The man has the plague pustule well developed under his arm-pits, purple and venomous, and he says, "Oh! I am perfectly well! nothing is the matter with me." But my notion of what I am is by no means infallible; and these consciences of ours the more need they have to speak, the less they do speak. They tell us that the electric light, brilliant as it is, is the worst possible thing to put into a lighthouse in a fog. And the light of conscience gets wonderfully obscured by the fogs that rise from the undrained swamps of our passions. So, because every sin tends to diffuse a cloud of ink, like the cuttle-fish when it is in danger, beneath which it manages to escape; and because we are all apt to be lenient with ourselves, and to use two sets of weights and measures,

one of which we apply to the faults of our brother and the other to our own; and because many of us are so little accustomed to an hour—an *hour*, did I say? to five minutes—of honest thinking about what sort of people we are in God's sight, therefore a great many of you this evening, when I am talking in this fashion, think I am only rolling out the correct pulpit platitudes, and talking about things that have no application to you. Ah! brethren, it is not so. Again I say, I beseech you to make acquaintance with yourselves, and you will find that the disease is there. The manifestations are various; the corruption is universal; and "there is none righteous; no, not one."

II. Notice where this sad crowd is housed.

Do you know what *Bethesda* means? "House of Mercy"; perhaps so named to commemorate some benefactor that had built the portico; more probably to suggest to the poor sick creatures a gleam of hope from the thought that God had love and care for them. There seemed a sharp contradiction between the condition of the people and the name. But we are gathered, as they were, in the House of Mercy. That is to say, though we have all departed from the right way, God's love encompasses us still, and this earth, seamed and stained as it has been by man's sin, is, notwithstanding, the chosen field in which He will manifest the tenderness of His compassion and the love of His heart. If any of you ever saw St. Peter's in Rome you will remember the great sweeping colonnades which extend from its front and reach out their arms as though they would embrace the city and the world; and in the midst there springs and sparkles a pure fountain. So God's

love compasses all us sick folk, and in the midst there rises the fountain which will heal. We are in the House of Mercy.

Does not that make our sin and forgetfulness of Him the darker, the more criminal, and the more tragical? And does not the assurance that God's great love is not turned away from men by their transgressions, but embraces them all and holds them still, feed the hope—nay, rather, inspire the certainty—that for all the cripples there is a cure, and for all the sick there is healing? It seems to me that any man that believes in a God who is not a devil ought to believe in a God who reveals Himself. And there, as I take it, is the very weakness of what nowadays is called Theism, that, asserting the existence of a Supreme Being who is love and righteousness, it maintains that that Being has never said a single word to men, and never done a single thing to lift them out of the mire. Whosoever may believe that, I cannot; and it seems to me that the doctrine of Christianity, that God has had compassion upon men, and has spoken to them, is far more in consonance with the assurance that He is love than that dreary creed that the infinite and loving God has not spoken, and never will nor can speak to His world. Carlyle, in one of his bursts of melancholy, said, speaking about the Deity as he conceived Him, "And He has done nothing!" He *has* done something. He has opened "a fountain for sin and for uncleanness." And He must have done it, if it is true that we are cripples and blind, and that we dwell in the House of Mercy.

But further, the thought that we are there explains the sadness which I have ventured to assert is the

ground-tone of human life, because righteous Love cannot but punish where sin has disturbed the relation between Him and men. The shallow optimism that said that all things were for the best in the best of all possible worlds, and went hop, skip, and jump, with eyes shut, over the darker facts of humanity, is hopelessly discredited to-day. And the world is rushing into the extreme opposite belief which they christen by the name of pessimism, which means what the Preacher said long ago, "Vanity of vanities! all is vanity!" It is the only creed possible for a man who has any deep knowledge of the facts of human life, unless he says "No! we dwell in the House of Mercy; and, being sick, the loving Father sends the drastic medicine of sorrows that we may be healed." He loves us too well not to smite; and the explanation of man's misery is man's sin, fought against by God's loving chastisement.

III. Further, note the vain expectation of healing.

I do not need to go over the pathetic story again, of how this man, for long weary years, had sat there watching, with hope growing fainter after each disappointment, for the bubbling up of the intermittent spring, and every time had been anticipated by one that had stepped down before him. But what I ask you to notice is that the conditions of the problem which was presented to him for solution were perfectly impossible. "If you can go down into the water you will be healed. But you cannot go down into the water. You would need to have been healed in order that you should." Now, brethren, that is exactly what every ethical system but Christianity says in regard to man's sin and man's sorrow. Wise teachers, great moralists, the law of our

own consciences, bid us get up and walk. But my lower limbs are atrophied, and I cannot. "If there had been a law that could have given life, then righteousness had been by the law." There is any quantity of noble precepts, fine exhortations—abundant as blackberries are these things that moralists say to us. But what is the good of all the talk, if there is no power to do the thing which the moralists tell us to do? "Break off your habits." Yes! how am I to break off my habits? "Lift yourselves above your lower selves." Yes! can I take myself by my own ears and lift myself up? There must be something outside of me to lift me. It is no use telling me what to do unless you give me the power to do it. And I want to know where is the power; where, in all the teachings that fill the world? Nowhere, except in the one word of the great Master.

Brethren, there are certain very speedily-reached limits within which a man, without any help consciously from Jesus Christ, may better himself. I am not going to deny that. But the limits are very easily reached, and the improvement is very superficial, and the experience of the man out of whom the seven demons were cast, and whose heart was left swept and garnished, and *empty*, and therefore filled speedily with another contingent of demons, is the transcript of what comes of all attempts to deal with man's sin, except the dealing with it by Jesus Christ. Every man his own saviour is a very popular idea nowadays. It is absolutely impossible of realisation. The attempt is vain because, in order to its success, you must have the very thing the want of which makes the attempt necessary.

IV. Lastly, note the Healer who comes to them that cannot come to the healing.

Jesus Christ drew near to this man. His attention was not attracted by any call from him. Hope was too far dead in him for that. It was not attracted by any intercession of others. He was passing by, and His eye rested, and His heart went out, to that poor, long-disappointed sufferer, and He said to him, "Wilt thou be made whole?"

Does not that teach us the spontaneous love of Jesus Christ to sinful men? The very same thing which led Him to speak to this paralytic brought Him from heaven. Not that He was asked to come, not that anything here on earth, in the nature of longing or yearning, brought Him down, but simply that His own heart impelled Him. He does not wait to be besought; before we call He will answer. "Like the dew upon the grass, that waiteth not for men, nor tarrieth for the sons of men" or like the sun that pours out its rays, not because the dancing planets around it send up their petitions for illumination, but because light must flow from it, and heat must circulate and impart itself, Christ's spontaneous love falls upon us all.

And does not the incident suggest to us, too, the individualising knowledge and appeal of Christ to each heart? He loves all because He loves each. Not only are universal and special affections perfectly harmonious in Him, but His universal affection is only the aggregate of His special affections. He individualises us. I would fain bring the message to each single soul in my audience. I would isolate you, dear brethren, as He isolates us in His regard and in His appeal. We stand, each of us alone,

on the insulating stool, in connection with the full-charged battery of His love. And He says to thee, thee, thee—to each one of us, "Wilt *thou* be made whole?" Do not lose yourselves in that crowd. The Gospel is for the world, but it is for you, and you have to deal with it for yourself, and by yourself.

Does not this incident teach us, too, the one condition that He requires from us for His healing power to operate upon us? "Wilt thou be made whole?" The question no doubt kindled a faint flicker of hope in the embers in the poor man's heart. It might sound superfluous to him, but there was something in the tone that asked it, which was more than half a promise that, if he would, he should be healed. The same question is put to us and has the same force. Christ cannot heal unless we will; He cannot but heal if we will. He can no more put His healing power into your heart without your desire than gold can be put into a casket that is closely shut, or food into lips that are firmly locked. But the misery is that men do not want to be healed. You would all like to escape hell, as you conceive it. But I am afraid there are a good many of you that have not the least wish to be cured of your faults and of your sins. So Christ can do nothing with you; and unless you want deliverance from guilt and from the love and the practice of sin, it is nothing to you that He is ready to save. Some of us are like soldiers in the hospital, wh would rather be ill than turn out to fight or work The desire is required if Christ's healing power is to come.

And then comes the commandment. "Arise! take up thy bed and walk." That sounds as if it involved the

very same contradiction and impossibility which was involved in the condition of getting healed at the pool But it is not so, because when He bade the man walk He gave him the power to walk ; and, in the effort, the limbs were restored to their vigour, and motion was possible once more.

The parallel does not serve us altogether, for it does not reveal to us that greatest of all truths, and most blessed of all mysteries, that He bare our sins in His own body on the tree ; and Himself took upon Him our infirmities and our sicknesses. The world is gathered round the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness. It is not intermittent, like its prototype in the miracle, but evermore His blood avails for us. It is not exhausted by one cure, or by two or three ; but there is enough for each and enough for all ; enough for thee and me and all our fellows. Christ is coming to you, dear friend, by my poor unworthy lips now, and saying "Wilt thou be made whole?" Do not ignore your disease. Do not try to patch yourselves up with quack medicines that your fellow-patients recommend. Take Christ for your Healer, for your healing, for your health. His name through faith in His name, can cast out the most inveterate and mortal sicknesses, and give perfect soundness to each of us. Nothing else can cure your disease, or stop it from running its course to its end in death.

THE CROSS THE PROOF OF THE LOVE OF GOD.

"God commendeth His love towards us, in that, whilst we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."—ROMANS v. 8.

"GOD *commendeth* His love." That is true and beautiful, but that is not all that the Apostle means. We "commend" persons and things when we speak of them with praise and confidence. If that were the meaning of my text it would represent the death of Christ as setting forth, in a manner to win our hearts, the greatness, the excellence, the transcendency, of God's love. But there is more than that in the words. The expression here employed strictly means to set two things side by side, and it has two meanings in the New Testament, both derived from that original signification. It sometimes means to set two persons side by side, in the way of introducing and recommending the one to the other. It sometimes means to set two things side by side, in the way of confirming or proving the one by the other. It is used in the latter sense here. God not merely "commends," but "proves," His love by Christ's death. It is the one evidence which makes that often-doubted fact certain. Through it alone is it possible to hold the conviction that, in spite of all that seems to contradict

the belief, God *is* Love. And *so* I wish to take the words in this sermon.

I. The need for proof that God does love.

To hear some men speak, you would suppose that one of the simplest, clearest, and most indisputable of all convictions was the Love of God. People are found in plenty who reject the distinctive teaching of Christianity, because they say that the sterner aspects of the evangelical faith seem to them to limit, or to contradict, the great fundamental truth of all religion, as they take it, that God is Love. My friends, such people are kicking away the ladder by which they climbed. I venture to say that instead of the love of God being a plain, self-evident axiom, there needs very strong evidence to give it a secure lodging-place amongst our settled beliefs.

Do the world's religions bear out the contention that it is so easy and natural for a man to believe in a loving God? I think not. Comparative mythology has taught a great many lessons, and amongst others this, that, apart from the direct or indirect influences of Christianity, there is no creed to be found in which the belief in a God of love and in the love of God is unfalteringly proclaimed, to say nothing of being set as the very climax of the whole revelation. If this were the place, one could pass in review men's thoughts about God, and ask you to look at all that assemblage of beings before whom mankind has bowed down. What would you find? Gods cruel, gods careless, gods capricious, gods lustful, gods mighty, gods mysterious, gods pitying, with a contempt mingled with the pity, their sorrows and follies of mankind, but in all the pantheons there is not a *loving* god. Before Jesus Christ there was no such

thought, or if it were there at all, it was there as a faint hope, a germ overlaid by other conceptions. Independent of Jesus Christ's influence, there is no such thought now; and where you find the death of Christ as *the* proof rejected and the conviction retained, as is often the case, you have only a sign that "the river of the water of life" has percolated to the roots of many a tree that grows far from its banks. It is Christ who has brought the fire of this conviction, in the broken reed of His dying flesh, and lodged it in the heart of humanity. So I say the love of God, as is proved by men's thoughts about Him, surely needs to be established on a basis of unmistakable evidence.

I add that all other evidences are insufficient. Do you appeal, in the fashion of Paley and the natural theologians, to the evidence of God in Creation? Ah! you have invoked a very ambiguous oracle, that seems to speak with two voices. I say nothing about the modification that that argument has necessarily assumed if the theory of evolution is accepted. I do not think it is destroyed, but it is profoundly modified. For if God put into matter the promise and the potency of all these variations, He must lie back of the process, and be conceived of as forecasting, if not guiding, the evolution which ends in development. So the argument has only changed in its form, and is unaffected in its substance.

But, putting aside all that, you speak of the goodness of God around us. What about storms, earthquakes, disasters, contrivances for producing pain, the law of destruction by which the creatures live by the slaying of one another—what about all these things? "Nature, red in tooth and claw with rapine, shrieks against the creed,"

that God is Love. And if we have nothing but the evidence of Nature, it seems to me that there are *two* voices speaking there; one of which says, "There is a good God"; and the other says, "Either His power is limited, or His goodness is partial."

The same ambiguous issue comes from the evidence of human life. Ah! brethren, we have only to look into our own lives and to look round upon the awful sights that fill the world, to make the robustest faith in the goodness and love of God stagger, unless it can stay itself against the upright stem of the Cross of Christ.

Sentimentalists may talk, but the grim fact of human suffering, of wretched, hopeless lives, rises up to say that there is no evidence broad and deep and solid enough, outside of Christianity, to make it absolutely certain that God is Love.

There is another thing that makes some irrefragable proof far firmer and stronger than any of these that I have been referring to, absolutely necessary, and that is, that conscience rises up and protests, when it is awake, against such a notion, apart from the Cross. Because everybody that honestly takes stock of himself, and conceives of God in any measure aright, must feel that the fact of sin has come in to disturb all the relations between God and man. And when once a man comes to say, "I feel that I am a sinful man, and that God is a righteous God; how can I expect that His love will distil in blessings upon my head?" there is only one answer—"Whilst we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

So for all these reasons I venture to lay it down as a principle, in spite of modern teaching of another sort, that the love of God is *not* a self-evident axiom, but needs to be proved.

II. The death that does prove the love.

How do we know, in our own happy experiences, that love exists in another heart to us? Surely, by acts. Words are well (and words are acts, of a sort); but we want something more. Paul thinks that, mightier than all demonstrations of a verbal kind, in order to establish the fact of love in the Divine heart to men, there must be some conspicuous and unmistakable act which is the outcome of that love. So mark that, when he wants to enforce this great truth, the shining climax of all the Gospel revelation of the love of God, he does not go back to Christ's gentle words, nor to His teaching of God as the Father;—he does not point to anything that He says, but he points to one thing that He did, and he says, "There! that cross is *the* demonstration."

And, since it has a special bearing on my subject, I wish to emphasise that distinction, and to beseech you to believe that you have not got within sight of the secret of Jesus, nor come near tapping the sources of His power, if you confine yourselves to His words and His teaching, or even to the lower *acts* of His gentle life, but that you must go to the Cross. It would have been much that he should have spoken with certitude and with sweetness else unparalleled of the love of God. But words, however eloquent, however true, are not enough for the soul to rest its weight upon. We must have deeds, and these are all summed in "Christ died for us."

Now, there are but two things that I wish to say about this great proof of the love of God in act. First, Christ's death proves God's love, because Christ is Divine.

How else do you account for that extraordinary shifting

of the persons in my text? "*God* proves His love because *Christ* died?" How so? God proved His love because Socrates died? God proved His love because some self-sacrificing doctor went into a hospital, and died in curing others? God proved His love because some man sprang into the sea and rescued a drowning woman, at the cost of his own life? Would such talk hold? Then I wish to know how it comes that Paul ventures to say that God proved His love, because Jesus Christ died.

Unless we believe that Jesus Christ is the Eternal Son of the Father, whom the Father sent, and who willingly came for us men and for our redemption; unless we believe that in Him dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily; unless we believe that, as He Himself said, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father"; unless we believe that His death was the act, the consequence, and the revelation of the love of God, who dwelt in Him as in none other of the sons of men, I, for one, venture to think that Paul is talking nonsense in my text, and that his argument is not worth a straw. You must come to the full-toned belief which, as I think, permeates and binds together every page of the New Testament—God so loved the world, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins; that Son who in the beginning was with God, and was God; and then a flood of light is poured on the words of my text, and we can adoringly bow the head and say, "Amen! God hath, to my understanding, and to my heart, proved and commended His love, in that Christ died for us!"

The second thought about this death that proves the love is, that it does so because it is a death for us. That

"for us" implies two things: one the voluntary act of God in Christ in giving Himself up to the death, the other the beneficial effect of that death. It was on our behalf, therefore it was the spontaneous outgush of an infinite love. It was for us, in that it brought an infinite benefit. And so it was a token and a manifestation of the love of God such as nothing else could be.

Now, I wish to ask a question very earnestly: in what conceivable way *can* Christ's death be a real benefit to me? How can it do me any good? A sweet, a tender, an unexampled, beautiful story of innocence and meekness and martyrdom which will shine in the memory of the world, and on the pages of history, as long as the world shall last; it is all that; but what good does it do me? Where does the benefit to me individually come in? There is only one answer, and I urge you to ask yourselves if, in plain, sober, common sense, the death of Jesus Christ means anything at all to anybody, more than other martyrdoms and beautiful deaths, except upon one supposition, that He died *for* us, because He died *instead of* us. The two things are not necessarily identical, but, as I believe, and venture to press upon you, in this case they are identical. I do not know where you will find any justification for the rapturous language of the whole New Testament about the death of Christ and its benefits flowing to the whole world, unless you take the Master's own words, "The Son of Man came to minister, and to give His life a ransom *instead of* many."

Ah, dear friends, there we touch the bed-rock. That is the truth that flashes up the Cross into lustre before which the sun's light is but darkness. He who bore it died for the whole world, and was the eternal Son of the

Father. If we believe that, then we can understand how Paul here blends together the heart of God and the heart of Christ, and sets high above Nature and her ambiguous oracles, high above Providence and its many perplexities, and in face of all the shrinkings and fears of a reasonably alarmed conscience, the one truth, "God hath proved His love for us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Is that your faith, your notion of Christ's death, and of its relation to the love of God?

III. Lastly, the love which is proved by the death.

There is much bearing upon that in my text, which I can barely spare time to draw out; but let us think for a moment of the fact which is thus the demonstration of the love of God, and try to realise what it is that that cross says to us, as we gaze upon the silent Sufferer meekly hanging there. I know that my words must fall far beneath the theme, but I can only hope that you will listen to them charitably, and try to better them for yourselves in your own thoughts.

I look, then, to the dying Christ, and I see there the revelation, because the consequence, of a love which is not called forth by any lovableness on the part of its objects. The Apostle emphasises that thought, if we render his words fully, because he says, "God proves *His own* love;" a love which, like all that belongs to that timeless, self-determining Being, has its reason and its roots in Himself alone. We love because we discern the object to be lovable. God loves by what I may venture to call the very necessity of His nature. Like some artesian well that needs no pumps nor machinery to draw up the sparkling waters, to flash

in the sunlight, there gushes up from the depths of His own heart the love which pours over every creature that He has made. He loves because He is God.

In like manner, another word of my text bears upon this matter, for he says, "Whilst we were yet sinners. Christ died for us." Oh! brethren, it is only the Gospel of a Dying Christ that can calm the reasonable consciousness of discord and antagonism that springs in a man's heart when he lets his conscience speak. It is because He died for us that we are sure now that the black mountain-wall of our sin, which, to our own apprehension, rises separating between us and our God is, if I may so say, surged over by the rising flood of His love. The Cross of Christ teaches me that, and so it is the Gospel for men that know themselves to be sinners. Is there anything else that teaches it? I know not where it is, if there be.

That dying Christ, hanging there, in the silence and the darkness of eclipse, speaks to me too, of a Divine love which, though not turned away by man's sin, is rigidly righteous.

I referred, at the beginning of my remarks, to the current, easy-going religion which says, "Oh! we do not want any of your evangelical contrivances for forgiveness. God is Love. That is enough for us." I venture to say that the thing which that form of thought calls love is not love at all, but pure weakness; such as in a king or in a father would be immoral. It is not otherwise in God. My brother! unless you can find some means whereby the infinite love of God can get at and soothe the sinner's heart without perilling God's righteousness, you have done nothing to the purpose. Such a

one-eyed, lop-sided gospel will never work, has not worked, and it never will. But, when I think of my Christ bearing the sins of the world, I say to myself, "Herein is love. By His stripes we are healed," and in Him love and righteousness are both crowned and wondrously brought into harmonious oneness. Is there anything else that will do that? If there be, I, for one, know not what it is.

Again, when I look on the dying Christ I see a Divine love, which is bounded by no limits of time or place. Look at that majestic and significant, "commendeth," not "commended" or "proved," as if it were a past fact, sliding away rapidly into the oblivion that wraps all past events as the world gets older, and its memory gets more burdened, but "commendeth" to-day, as it commended eighteen hundred years ago.

Remember to whom Paul was speaking—people that had never seen Jesus Christ—many of whom had not been in the world when He left it. Yet He says "that Cross stands there for you of this second generation as the present proof of eternal love."

And, my friends, it stands for us men and women in Manchester as truly as for the men and women of Galilee or of Rome. There is no limit of time at all, either to the power of the proof, or to the love that it establishes. But to-day, as long ago of old, and as it will be in the remotest future, the Cross of Christ towers up, like some great mountain beacon, when all beneath is lost to sight, as the one eternal demonstration of an everlasting love.

And now, dear brethren, "proves" is a cold word. It is addressed to the head. "Commends" is a warmer

word. It is addressed to the heart. It is not enough to establish the fact that God loves. Arguments may be wrought in frost as well as in fire; and if I have erred in any measure in that regard this evening, I ask pardon of Him and of you. But it is your hearts I want to get at—through your heads, indeed; but I do not care to make you orthodox believers in a doctrine. That is all very well, but it is a very small part of our work. I want your hearts to be touched, and that Christ shall be not only the answer to your doubts, but the Sovereign of your affections. Do you look on the death of Christ as a death for your sin? In the strength of the revelation that it makes of the love of God, do you front the perplexities, the miseries of the world, and the ravelled skeins of Providence with calm, happy faces? And oh! —most important of all—do you meet that love with an answering love?

There are two passages of Scripture which contain the whole secret of a noble, blessed, human life. And here they are: "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life." If that is your thought about God, you know enough about Him for time and eternity. "We love Him, because He first loved us." If you can say that about yourself, all is well.

Dear friend, do you believe the one? Do you affirm the other?

THE SERVANT AS HIS LORD.

"As He is, so are we in this world."—1 JOHN iv. 17.

LARGE truths may be spoken in little words. Profundity is often supposed to be obscurity, but the deepest depth is clear. John, in his gospel and epistles, deals with the deepest realities, and with all things in their eternal aspects, but his vocabulary is the simplest in the New Testament. God and the world, life and death, love and hate, light and darkness—these are the favourite words round which his thoughts gather. Here are nine little monosyllables. What can be simpler than "As He is so, are we in this world"? And what can go beyond the thought that lies in it, that a Christian is a living likeness of Christ?

But the connection of my text is quite as striking as its substance. John has been dwelling upon his favourite thought that to abide in love is to abide in God, and God in us. And then he goes on to say that "Herein"—that is, in such mutual abiding in love—"is love made perfect with us;" and the perfection of that love, which is thus communion, is in order that, at the great solemn day of future trial, men may lift up their faces and meet His glance—which is *not* strange to them, nor met for the first time—with open-hearted and open-countenanced "boldness." But "love" and 'abiding"

are the source of confidence in the Day of Judgment, because love and abiding are the source of assimilation to Christ's life. We have boldness, "because as He is, so are we in this world;" and we are as He is, because we love and abide in Him. So here are three thoughts, the assimilation of the Christian man to Christ; the frank confidence which it begets; and the process by which it is secured.

I. A Christian is Christ's living likeness.

That is a startling thing to say, and all the more startling if you notice that John does not say "As He *was*," in this earthly life of humiliation and filial obedience, but "as He *is*," in His heavenly life and reign and glory. That might well repel us from all thought of possible resemblance, but the light, however brilliant it may be, is not blinding, and it is the Christ as He *is*, and not only—true as that is—the Christ as He *was*, who is the original of which Christian men are copies.

Now, *there* is the difference between the teaching of such classes of religionists as represent Christ's humanity as all in all, and preach to us that He, in His earthly life, is the pattern to whom we are to seek to conform our lives, and the true evangelical teaching. That dead Man is living, and His present life has in it elements which we can grasp, and to which every Christian life is to be conformed.

Is there anything, then, within the glory to which I, in my poor, struggling, hampered, imperfect life here on earth, can feel that my character is being shaped? Yes! surely there is. I have no doubt that, in the words of my text the Apostle is remembering the solem-

ones of our Lord's high-priestly prayer, as recorded in the seventeenth chapter of his gospel, where the same antithesis of our being in the world, and His not being there, recurs; and where the analogy and resemblance are distinctly stated—"I in Thee, and Thou in Me, that they also may be in us."

So, then, when we stand with our letter-writer in his Patmos island, and see the countenance "as the sun shining in his strength, and the eyes as a flame of fire," and the many crowns upon the head, and the many stars in the hand, though we may feel as if all resemblance was at an end, and aspiration after likeness could only fall at his feet and cover its face, yet there is within the glory something which may be repeated and reproduced in our lives, and that is, the indissoluble union of a Son with a Father, in all loving obedience, in all perfect harmony, in all mutual affection and outgoing of heart and thoughts. This is the centre of the life, alike of the Christ when He is glorified, and of the Christ when He was upon earth. So the very secret heart of the mysterious being of the Son is to be, and necessarily is, repeated in all those who in Him have received the adoption of sons.

Or, to put the whole thing into plainer words, it is the religious and the moral aspects of Christ's being, and not any one particular detail thereof; and these, as they live and reign on the Throne, just as truly as these, as they suffered and wept upon earth—it is these to which it is our destiny to be conformed. We are like Him, if we are His, in this that we are joined to God, that we hold fellowship with Him, that our lives are all permeated with the Divine, that we are

saturated with the presence of God, that we have submitted ourselves to Him and to His will, that "not my will, but Thine, be done" is the very inmost meaning of our hearts and our lives. And thus "we," even here, "bear the image of the heavenly, as we have borne the images of the earthly." Now, I am not going to dwell upon details; all these can be filled in by each of us for himself. The centre-point which I insist upon is this—the filial union with God, the filial submission to Him, and the consequent purity as Christ is pure, righteousness as Christ is righteous, and walking even as Christ walked, for ever in the light.

But, then, there is another point that I desire to refer to. I have put an emphasis upon the "is" instead of the "was," as it applies to Jesus Christ. I would further put an emphasis upon the "are," as it applies to us—"So *are* we."

John is not exhorting, he is affirming. He is not saying what Christian men ought to strive to be, but he is saying what all Christian men, by virtue of their Christian character, *are*. Or, to put it into other words, likeness to the Master is certain. It is inevitably involved in the relation which a Christian man bears to the Lord. There may be degrees in the likeness, there may be differences of skill and earnestness in the artist. We have to labour like a portrait painter, slowly and tentatively approaching to the complete resemblance. It is "a life-long task ere the lump be leavened." This likeness does not reach its completeness by a leap. It is not struck, as the image of a king is, upon the blank metal disc, by one stroke, but it is wrought out by long, laborious, and, as I said, approximating and tentative

touches. My text suggests that to us by its addition, "So are we, *in this world.*" The "world"—or, to use modern phraseology, "the environment"—conditions the resemblance. As far as it is possible for a thing encompassed with dust and ashes to resemble the radiant sun in the heavens, so far is the resemblance carried here. Some measure of it, and a growing measure, is inseparable from the reality of a Christian life.

Now, you Christian people, does that plain statement touch you anywhere? "So *are* we." Well! you would be quite easy if John had said: "So *may* we be; so *should* we be; so *shall* we be. But what about the "so *are* we"? What a ghastly contradiction the lives of multitudes of professing Christians are to that plain statement! "Like Jesus Christ"—would anybody say that about anything in me? "So are we"—no words of mine, dear brethren, can make the statement more searching, more impressive; but, I pray you, lay this to heart: "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His." You may take sacraments and profess Christianity, or, as we Nonconformists have it, "join churches," and do all manner of outward work for ever and a day; but if you have not the likeness of Christ, at least in germ, and growing to something more than a germ, in your characters, you had better revise your position, and ask whether, after all, you have not been walking in a vain show, and fancied yourselves the servants of Christ, while you bear the image of Christ's enemy.

A very tiny gully on a hillside, made by showers of rain, may fall into the same slopes, and has been

created by the very same forces, working according to the same laws, as have scooped out valleys miles broad, bordered by mountains thousands of feet high. And in my little life, poor as it is, limited as it is, environed as it is by the world, and therefore often hampered and stained, as well as helped and brightened, by its environment, there may be, and there will be, in some degree, if I am a Christian man, the very same power at work by which Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, shines as the sun on the throne of the universe.

But then, notice further, how that limitation to which I have referred in this world carries with it another message. *There* is Christ in the heavens, veiled and unseen. Here are you on earth, his representative. There is a rage at present for putting pictures into all books, and folk will scarcely read unless they get illustrated literature. The world has for its illustrations of the Gospel the lives of us Christian people. In the book there are principles and facts, and readers should be able to turn the page and see all pictured in us.

That is what you are set to do in this world. "As the Father sent me, even so send I you." "As He is, so are we in this world." It may be our antagonist, but it is our sphere, and its presence is necessary to evoke our characters. Christ has entrusted His reputation, His honour, to us, and many a man that never cares to look at *Him* as He is revealed in Scripture, would be wooed and won to look at Him and love Him, if we Christian people were more true to our vocation, and bore more conspicuously on our faces and in our characters the image of the heavenly.

II. Look for a moment at the second thought that is

here: such a likeness to Jesus Christ is the only thing that will enable a man to lift up his head in the Day of Judgment.

"We have boldness," says John, *because* "as He is, so are we." Now, that is a very strong statement of a truth that popular, evangelical theology has far too much obscured. People talk about being, at the last, "accepted in the beloved." God be thanked, it is true. A sweet old hymn that a great many of us learned when we were children, though it is not so well known in these days, says:—

> Bold shall I stand in that great day,
> For who aught to my charge shall lay,
> While through Thy blood absolved I am
> From sin's tremendous curse and shame?

I believe that, and I try to preach it. But do not let us forget the other side. My text is in full accordance with the principles of our Lord's own teaching; and who knows the principles of His own words so well as the judge, who tells us, in His pictures of that great day, that the question put to every man will be, not what you *believe*, but what did you *do*, and what *are* you?

But this truth of my text has been not only wounded in the house of the friends of Christianity, but it has been overlooked by one of the very frequent objections that we hear made to evangelical teaching, that, according to it, a man is judged according to his belief and not according to his deeds. A man is judged according to his—not *belief*—but according to his *faith*. But he is judged according also to—not his *work*—but according to his *character*.

And I wish, dear friends, to lay this upon your hearts, because many of us are too apt to forget it, that whilst unquestionably the beginning of salvation, and the condition of forgiveness here, and of acceptance hereafter, are laid in trust in Jesus Christ, that trust is sure to work out a character which is in conformity with His requirements and moulded after the likeness of Himself. "The judgment of God is according to truth," and what a man is determines where a man shall be, and what he shall receive through all eternity. Remember Christ's own teaching. Remember the teaching of that other Apostle than John, according to which the "wood, hay, stubble," built by a man upon the foundation shall be burned up, and the builder himself be saved, yet so as by fire. And lay this to heart, that it is only when faith works in us, through love and communion, characters like Jesus Christ's, that we shall be able to stand—though even then we shall have to trust to Divine and infinite mercy, and to the sprinkling of His blood—before the Throne of God. Lay up in store for yourselves a good foundation unto eternal life. And take this as the preaching of my text; character, and character alone, will stand the judgment of that great day.

There is no real antagonism between such truths and the widest preaching of salvation by faith. It is the same man who, in his gospel, says, as from the lips of the Lord Himself, "He that believeth is not judged," and in his letter says, "We may have boldness in that day, because, as He is, so are we in this world."

III. One word about the last point; the process by which this likeness is secured.

That is contained, as I tried to show in my introductory

remarks, in the earlier part of the verse. Our love is made perfect by dwelling in God, and God in us; in order that we may be thus conformed to Christ's likeness, and so have boldness in that great day. To be like Jesus Christ, what is needed is that we love Him, and that we keep in touch with Him. What is it to "abide" in Him? —to direct the continual flow of mind and love and will and practical obedience to Him, to bear Him ever in the secret place of my heart whilst my hands are occupied with daily business, and my feet are running the sometimes rough race that is set before me. Think of Him ever, love Him ever. Let His name be like a perfume breathed through the whole atmosphere of your lives. Keep your wills in the attitude of submission, of acceptance, of indecision when necessary, and of absolute dependence upon Him. Let your outward acts be such as shall not bring a film of separation between Him and you. When thus our whole being is steeped and drenched with Christ, then it cannot but be that we shall be like Him. Even "clouds themselves as suns appear, when the sun pierces them with light." "Abide in Me, and I in you." You cannot make yourselves like Christ, but you can fasten yourselves to Christ, and He will give you power which shall make you like Him.

But, remember, such abiding is no idle waiting, no passive confidence. It is full of energy, full of suppression, when necessary, of what is contrary to your truest self, and full of strenuous cultivation of that which is in accord with the will of the Father, and with the likeness of the "first-born among many brethren."

Dear friends, lie in the light and you will become light. Abide in Christ, and you will get like Christ;

and, being like Him, you will be able to lift up your heads, and rejoice when you front Him on the Throne, and you are at the bar. Then, when you are no more in the world, the likeness will be perfected, because the communion is complete. "We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is."

LOVE AND FEAR.

"There is no fear in love, but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love."—1 JOHN iv. 18.

JOHN has been speaking of boldness, and that naturally suggests its opposite—fear. He has been saying that perfect love produces courage in the day of judgment, because it produces likeness to Christ, who is the Judge. In my text he explains and enlarges that statement. For there is another way in which love produces boldness, and that is by its casting out fear. These two are mutually exclusive. The entrance of the one is for the other a notice to quit. We cannot both love and fear the same person or thing, and where love comes in, the darker form slips out at the door; and where Love comes in, it brings hand in hand with itself Courage with her radiant face. But boldness is the companion of love, only when love is perfect. For, inconsistent as the two emotions are, love, in its earlier stages and lower degrees, is often perturbed and dashed by apprehension and dread.

Now John is speaking about the two emotions in themselves, irrespective, so far as his language goes, of the objects to which they are directed. What he is saying is true about love and fear, whatever or who-

soever may be loved or dreaded. But the context suggests the application in his mind, for it is "boldness before him" about which he has been speaking; and so it is love and fear directed towards God which are meant in my text. The experience of hosts of professing Christians is only too forcible a comment upon the possibility of a partial Love lodging in the heart side by side with a fellow-lodger, Fear, whom it ought to have expelled. So there are three things here that I wish to notice—the empire of fear, the mission of fear, and the expulsion of fear.

I. The empire of fear.

Fear is a shrinking apprehension of evil as befalling us, from the person or thing which we dread. My text brings us face to face with that solemn thought that there are conditions of human nature, in which the God who ought to be our dearest joy and most ardent desire becomes our ghastliest dread. The root of such an unnatural perversion of all that a creature ought to feel towards its loving Creator lies in the simple consciousness of discordance between God and man, which is the shadow cast over the heart by the fact of sin. God is righteous; God righteously administers His universe. God enters into relations of approval or disapproval with His responsible creature. Therefore there lies, dormant for the most part, but present in every heart, and active in the measure in which that heart is informed as to itself, the slumbering cold dread that between it and God things are *not* as they ought to be.

I believe, for my part, that such a dumb, dim consciousness of discord attaches to all men, though it is

often smothered, often ignored, and often denied. But there it is; the snake hybernates, but it is coiled in the heart all the same; and warmth will awake it. Then it lifts its crested head, and shoots out its forked tongue, and venom passes into the veins. A dread of God is the ghastliest thing in the world, the most unnatural, but universal, unless expelled by perfect love.

Arising from that discomforting consciousness of discord there come, likewise, other forms and objects of dread. For if I am out of harmony with Him, what will be my fate in the midst of a universe administered by Him, and in which all are His servants? Oh! I sometimes wonder how it is that godless men front the facts of human life, and do not go mad. For here are we, naked, feeble, alone, plunged into a whirlpool, from the awful vortices of which we cannot extricate ourselves. There foam and swirl all manner of evils, some of them certain, some of them probable, any of them possible, since we are at discord with Him who wields all the forces of the universe, and wields them all with a righteous hand. "The stars in their courses fight against" the man that does not fight for God. Whilst all things serve the soul that serves Him, all are embattled against the man that is against, or not for, God and His will.

Then there arises up another object of dread, which, in like manner, derives all its power to terrify and to hurt from the fact of our discordance with God; and that is "the shadow feared of man," that stands shrouded by the path, and waits for each of us.

God; God's universe; God's messenger, Death—these are facts with which we stand in relation, and if our

relations with Him are out of gear, then He and all of these are legitimate objects of dread to us.

But now there is something else that casts out fear than perfect love, and that is—perfect levity. For it is the explanation of the fact that so many of us know nothing of this fear of which I speak, and fancy that I am exaggerating, or putting forward false views. There is a type of man, and I have no doubt there are some of its representatives among my hearers, who are below both fear and love as directed towards God; for they never think about Him, or trouble their heads concerning either Him or their relations to Him or anything that flows therefrom. It is a strange faculty that we all have, of forgetting unwelcome thoughts and shutting our eyes to the things that we do not want to see, like Nelson when he put the telescope to his blind eye at Copenhagen, because he would not obey the signal of recall. But surely it is an ignoble thing that men should ignore or shuffle out of sight with inconsiderateness the real facts of their condition, like boys whistling in a churchyard to keep their spirits up, and saying "Who's afraid?" just because they are so very much afraid. Ah! dear friends, do not rest until you face the facts, and having faced them, have found the way to reverse them. Surely, surely it is not worthy of men, to turn away from anything so certain as that between a sin-loving man and God there must exist such a relation as will bring evil and sorrow to that man, as surely as God is and he is. I beseech you, take to heart these things, and do not turn away from them with a shake of your shoulders, and say, "He is preaching the narrow, old-fashioned doctrine of

a religion of fear." No! I am not. But I am preaching this plain fact, that a man who is in discord with God has reason to be afraid, and I come to you with the old exhortation of the prophet, "Be troubled, ye careless ones." For there is nothing more ignoble or irrational than security which is only made possible by covering over unwelcome facts. "Be troubled"; and let the trouble lead you to the Refuge.

II. That brings me to the second point—viz., the mission of fear.

John uses a rare word in my text when he says "fear hath torment." "Torment" does not convey the whole idea of the word. It means suffering, but suffering for a purpose; suffering which is correction; suffering which is disciplinary; suffering which is intended to lead to something beyond itself. Fear, the apprehension of personal evil, has the same function in the moral world as pain has in the physical. It is a symptom of disease, and is intended to bid us look for the remedy and the Physician. What is an alarm bell for, but to rouse the sleepers, and to hurry them to the refuge? And so this wholesome, manly dread of the certain issue of discord with God is meant to do for us what the angels did for Lot—to lay a mercifully violent hand on the shoulder of the sleeper, and shake him into aroused wakefulness, and hasten him out of Sodom, before the fire bursts through the ground, and is met by the fire from above. The intention of fear is to lead to that which shall annihilate it by taking away its cause.

There is nothing more ridiculous, nothing more likely to destroy a man, than the indulgence in an idle fear

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which does nothing to prevent its own fulfilment. Horses in a burning stable are so paralysed by dread that they cannot stir, and get burnt to death. And for a man to be afraid—as every one ought to be who is conscious of unforgiven sin—for a man to be afraid and there an end, is absolute insanity. I fear; then what do I do? Nothing. That is true about hosts of us.

What ought I to do? Let the dread direct me to its source, my own sinfulness. Let the discovery of my own sinfulness direct me to its remedy, the righteousness and the Cross of Jesus Christ. He, and He alone, can deal with the disturbing element in my relation to God. He can "deliver me from my enemies, for they are too strong for me." It is Christ and His work, Christ and His sacrifice, Christ and His indwelling Spirit that will grapple with and overcome sin and all its consequences, in any man and in every man; taking away its penalty, lightening the heart of the burden of its guilt, delivering from its love and dominion—all three of which things are the barbs of the arrows with which fear riddles heart and conscience. So my fear should proclaim to me the merciful "name that is above every name," and drive me as well as draw me to Christ, the Conqueror of sin, and the Antagonist of all dread.

Brethren, I said I was not preaching the religion of Fear. But I think we shall scarcely understand the religion of Love unless we recognise that dread is a legitimate part of an unforgiven man's attitude towards God. My fear should be to me like the misshapen guide that may lead me to the fortress where I shall be safe. Oh! do not tamper with the wholesome sense

of dread. Do not let it lie, generally sleeping, and now and then waking in your hearts, and bringing about nothing. Sailors that crash on with all sails set—stun-sails and all—whilst the barometer is rapidly falling, and boding clouds are on the horizon, and the line of the approaching gale is ruffling the sea yonder, have themselves to blame if they founder. Look to the falling barometer, and make ready for the coming storm, and remember that the mission of fear is to lead you to the Christ who will take it away.

III. Lastly, the expulsion of fear.

My text points out the natural antagonism, and mutual exclusiveness, of these two emotions. If I go to Jesus Christ as a sinful man, and get His love bestowed upon me, then, as the next verse to my text says, my love springs in response to His to me, and in the measure in which that love rises in my heart will it frustrate its antagonistic dread.

As I said, you cannot love and fear the same person, unless the love is of a very rudimentary and imperfect character. But, just as when you pour pure water into a bladder, the poisonous gases that it may have contained will be driven out before it, so when love comes in, dread goes out. The river, turned into the foul Augean stables of the heart, will sweep out all the filth and leave everything clean. The black, greasy smoke-wreath, touched by the fire of Christ's love, will flash out into ruddy flames, like that which has kindled them; and Christ's love will kindle in your hearts, if you accept it and apprehend it aright, a love which shall burn up and turn into fuel for itself the now useless dread.

But, brethren, remember that it is "*perfect* love" which "casts out fear."

Inconsistent as the two emotions are in themselves, in practice, they may be united, by reason of the imperfection of the nobler. And in the Christian life they are united with terrible frequency. There are many professing Christian people who live all their days with a burden of shivering dread upon their shoulders, and an icy cold fear in their hearts, just because they have not got close enough to Jesus Christ, nor kept their hearts with sufficient steadfastness under the quickening influences of His love, to have shaken off their dread as a sick man's distempered fancies. A little love has not mass enough in it to drive out thick, clustering fears. There are hundreds of professing Christians who know very little indeed of that joyous love of God which swallows up and makes impossible all dread, who, because they have not a loving present consciousness of a loving Father's loving will, tremble when they front in imagination, and still more when they meet in reality, the evils that must come, and who cannot face the thought of death with anything but shrinking apprehension. There is far too much of the old leaven of selfish dread left in the experiences of many Christians. "I feared thee, because thou wert an austere man, and so, because I was afraid, I went and hid my talent, and did nothing for thee" is a transcript of the experience of far too many of us. The one way to get deliverance is to go to Jesus Christ and keep close by Him.

And my last word to you is, see that you resort only to the sane, sound way of getting rid of the wholesome, rational dread of which I have been speaking. You

can ignore it; and buy immunity at the price of leaving in full operation the *causes* of your dread—and that is stupid. There is only one wise thing to do, and that is, to make sure work of getting rid of the occasion of dread, which is the fact of sin. Take all your sin to Jesus Christ; He will—and He only can—deal with it. He will lay His hand on you, as He did of old, with the characteristic word that was so often upon His lips, and which He alone is competent to speak in its deepest meaning, "Fear not, it is I," and He will give you the courage that He commands.

"God hath not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." "Ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but ye have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry Abba, Father," and cling to Him, as a child who knows his father's heart too well to be afraid of anything in his father, or of anything that his father's hand can send.

THE RAY AND THE REFLECTION.

"We love Him, because He first loved us."—1 JOHN iv. 19.

VERY simple words! but they go down into the depths of God, lifting burdens off the heart of humanity, turning duty into delight, and changing the aspect of all things. He who knows that God loves him needs little more for blessedness; he who loves God back again offers more than all burnt offering and sacrifices. But it is to be observed that the correct reading of my text, as you will find in the Revised Version, omits "Him" in the first clause, and simply says "we love," without specifying the object. That is to say, for the moment John's thought is fixed rather on the inward transformation effected, from self-regard to love—than on considering the object on which the love is expended. When the heart is melted, the streams flow wherever there is a channel. The river, as he goes on to show us, parts into two heads, and love to God and love to man are, in their essence and root-principle, one thing.

So my text is the summary of all revelation about God, the ultimate word about all our relations to Him, and the all-inclusive directory as to our conduct to one another. To know that God loves, and to love again—there is a little pocket encyclopædia in two volumes,

which contains the smelted-down essence of all theology and of all morality. Let us look at these three points.

I. The ultimate word about God.

"He first loved us." Properly and strictly speaking, that "first" only declares the priority of the Divine love towards us over ours towards Him. But we may fairly give it a wider meaning, and say—first of all, ere Creation and Time, away back in the abysmal depths of an everlasting and changeless heart, changeless in the sense that its love was eternal, but not changeless in the sense that love could have no place within it—first of all things was God's love; last to be discovered because most ancient of all. The foundation is disclosed last when you come to dig, and the essence is grasped last in the process of analysis.

So one of the old psalms, with wondrous depth of truth, traces up everything to this, "For His mercy endureth for ever." Therefore, there was time; therefore, there were creatures—"He made great lights, for His mercy endureth for ever." Therefore, there were judgments—"He slew famous kings . . . for His mercy endureth for ever." And so we may pass through all the works of the Divine energy, and say, "He first loved us."

It is no accident that there are but foregleams of this great thought brightening the words and the thoughts of psalmist and prophet, saint and sage, from the beginning onwards, while the articulate utterance of the simple sentence was first heard from the lips of Him who declared the Father, and stands in that part of the Book which, both in its position there, and in its date of composition is the last of the Apostolic utterances.

"God is love"—that is in one aspect the foundation of His being, and in another aspect the shining ruby set on the very sky-piercing summit of the completed process of the revelation of that Being to man. "He first loved us;" and thence, from that centre and germinal point, streams out the whole train of consequences in the Divine activity, and in the Divine self-revelation.

I need not ask you to contrast with this infinitely simple and infinitely deep utterance all other thoughts of a Divine Being—the cold abstractions of Theism, the dim dreads of popular apprehension, the vague utterances of any mythology, the clouds that men's thoughts have covered over the face of this great truth—and then, to set by the side of all these groping, these peradventures, these fears, these narrow, unworthy ideas, the clear simplicity, the infinite depth of "He first loved us."

But I may ask you to consider, but for a moment, the relation which all the other perfection of the Divine nature have to this central and foundation one. There are all those pompous names "Omnipresence" and "Omniscience" and the like, which are but the negations of the limitations of humanity or of finite creatures. There are the more spiritual and moral thoughts of Wisdom and Righteousness and the like. These are but the fringes of the glory: I was going to venture to say that the Divinest thing in God is love. There is the central blaze; the rest is but the brilliant periphery that encloses it. And that infinite love stands to all these other attributes in the relation of being their master and motive spring. They are Love's instrument, and in the Divine nature Love is Lord of all. They give it majesty; it gives them tenderness. We may reverently say, in

regard to the Divine nature, what the Apostle says about our humanity, that love is the "bond of perfectness"—the girdle which, braced round all the garments, keeps them in their place. For round these infinite, innumerable, unnameable, and named Divine perfections, is that which brings them all into symmetry and keeps them all in harmonious action—Love. He has wisdom, and power, and eternal being, but He is Love.

But do not let us forget that whilst thus my text proclaims the ultimate truth, these other attributes, as they are called, are all smelted down, as it were, into, and present in, the love which is their crown. The same Apostle, who has thus the honour of ringing out to the world the good news that God is Love, declares that, "this is the message" which he has to tell, that "God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all." So the light of righteousness, as well as the lambent flame of love, burn together on that central fire of the universe. We must not so conceive of the love of God, as to darken the radiance of His righteousness, or to obscure the brilliancy of that pure light which tolerates no admixture of darkness.

May I venture a step further, and ask whether we are not warranted in believing that in that which we call the love of God there do abide the same elements as characterise the thing that bears the same name in our human experience? The spectrum has told us that the constituents of the mighty sun in the heavens are the same as the constituents of this little darkened earth. And there are the same lines in the Divine spectrum that there are in ours. So, if we can venture to say of Him, He is Love, do not let us shrink from saying that

then, like us, He delights in the companionship of His beloved ; that, like us, He rejoices in giving Himself to His beloved ; that like us, but infinitely, He desires the good of His beloved ; and that, like us, He seeks only for the requital of an answering love. All these things, the joy of the Lord in man, the yielding of the Lord to man, the beneficent desire of the Lord for the good of man, and the hunger of the Lord for the response of love from man—all these things are affirmed when we affirm that God is Love.

Our Apostle would concur heartily in the great text which was the theme of a recent sermon.* Paul said, "God establishes His love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." John says, "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins."

So the Cross of Christ is the one demonstration that God loved us. Looking to it we can say, with a great modern teacher :—

> So the All-great were the All-loving too,
> So through the thunder comes a human voice,
> Saying "Oh ! heart I made ; a heart beats here,
> Face, My hands fashioned, see it in Myself ;
> Thou hast no power, nor mayest conceive of Mine ;
> But love I gave thee, with Myself to love,
> And thou must love Me, who have died for thee.

II. Here we have the ultimate word as to our religion. "We love Him, because He first loved us." There is a bridge wanted between these two, and the bridge is supplied abundantly in this letter, in entire harmony with the teaching of the rest of the New Testament. Much

* Page 275.

has been said, and profitably said, with reference to the modification of the general type of Christian teaching in the writings respectively of Paul, Peter, James, and John. I thankfully recognise the diversities. They are not divergencies; they are perfectly complementary, and may all be made to harmonise. This Apostle of love has also declared to us how it comes that the love which burns at the centre of things, where there is a heart, kindles a responding love away out on the circumference of things, where there are men with hearts; and the bridge is—"We have known and believed the love that God hath to us." So says John. And Paul, the Apostle of faith, who sometimes seems as if his only conception of the link of union between God and man was, on the part of man, faith, responds when he speaks of a faith which worketh, comes to energetic operation, through the love which it has kindled.

So we come to this, that a simple trust in the love of God, as manifested in Jesus Christ, our Lord, is the only thing which will so deal with man's natural self-regard and desire to make himself his own object and centre, as to substitute for that the victorious love to God. You cannot love God, unless you believe that He loves you. You will never be absolutely sure of that, unless you have learned it from the Cross of Christ. You will not respond with the love that He desires, but there will be a film between your ice and the fire that could melt it, until that is swept away by the simple act of confidence in God manifested to you in Jesus Christ. This is Christianity; this, nothing less, is religion—to love God, because I believe that in Jesus Christ God has loved me.

And that is the only thing that He desires or accepts.

The Religion of Fear; what is it? "Thou wert an austere man . . . and I was afraid." Yes! and what did you do when you were afraid? "I hid my talent in the ground," and was utterly idle. Here rise, on either side of the valley, two mountains—Ebal and Gerizim. From the one were thundered the curses, from the other broke the benediction of the blessings; the one is barren, the other is verdant—"which thing is an allegory." The Religion of Fear does nothing, the Religion of Love does all. The Religion of Self-interest is narrow, poor, mostly inoperative of any lofty enthusiasm or high nobleness of character. The Religion of Duty; "I ought to worship, I am bidden to do this, that, or the other thing, which I do not a bit like to do. I am forbidden to do this, that, and the other thing which I should very much like to do, if I durst"—that religion is the religion of a slave; and there are hosts of us that know nothing better. And so our Christianity is a feeble and an uncomfortable thing; and there are little joy, and little subjugation of the will, and little leaping up of the heart in glad obedience in it. I was talking to a good, aged man, not long ago, whose religion was of a very gloomy type. He said to me, "As to love, I know next to nothing about it." Ah! brethren, I am afraid that is true about a good many of us who call ourselves Christians.

Then let me say, too, that if we love Him, it will be the motive power and spring of all manner of obediences and glad services. Love is the mother-tincture, so to speak, which you can colour, and to which you can add in various ways, and produce variously tinted and tasted and perfumed commixtures. Love lies at the foundation

of all Christian goodness. It will lead to the subjugation of the will; and that is the thing that is most of all needed to make a man righteous and pure. So St. Augustine's paradox, rightly understood, is a magnificent truth "Love! and do what you will." For then you will be sure to will what God wills, and you ought.

If this be the summing-up of all religion, a practical conclusion follows. When we feel ourselves defective in the glow and operative driving power of love to God, what is the right thing to do? When a man is cold, he will not warm himself by putting a clinical thermometer into his mouth, and taking his temperature, will he? Let him go into the sunshine and he will be warmed up. You can pound ice in a mortar, and except for the little heat generated by the impact of the pestle, it will keep ice still. But float the iceberg south into the tropics, and what has become of it? It has all run down into sweet warm water, and mingled with the warm ocean that has dissolved it. So do not think about yourselves and your own loveless hearts so much, but think about God, and the infinite welling up of love in His heart to you, a great deal more. "We love Him, because He first loved us;" therefore, to love Him more, we must feel more that He does love us.

III. Lastly, here is the ultimate word about our conduct to men.

I said that John, by leaving out any specification of the object of love, as well as by the verses that immediately follow, shows that he regards the emotion as one, though its direction is two-fold. That just comes to the plain truth, that the only victorious antagonist to the self-regarding temperament of average men, and the

only power which will change philanthropy from a sentiment into a self-denying and active principle of conduct, is to be found in the belief of the love of God in Jesus Christ, and in answering love to Him.

That is a lesson for many sorts of people to-day. What they call altruism is no discovery of Christianity, but its practice is. I freely admit that there is much honest and self-sacrificing beneficence and benevolence which are not connected, in the men who practise them, with faith in Jesus Christ. But I question very much whether these would have existed if the story of the Cross had been unknown. And sure I am that the history of non-Christian attempts to promote the brotherhood of man, and to diffuse a wide and operative love of mankind, teaches us, on the one side, that the emotion is not strong enough to last, and to work, unless it is based on God's love in Jesus Christ. And the history of Christianity, on the other side, though with many defects and things to be ashamed of, teaches us, conversely, that wherever there is a genuine love of God, its exterior form, so to say, the outside of it which is presented to the world, will be true love to man.

Christian people, lay this to heart: you are to be mirrors of the love to which you turn for all blessedness and peace. It is of no use to say, "My religion is the love of God" unless the love of God is manifested in the love of man. If you love God, you will love those that God loves, those for whom Christ died, those who are just like what *you* were when you learned that God loved you. The service of God is the service of man.

One last word, "We love Him, because He first loved us." Do you? Or is it rather true of you; "I do not

love God, though He has loved me"? I saw not long since, up on the flank of a mountain, an obstinate patch of snow, that had fronted, in unmelted cold, months of the summer sun. There are some of us who lift a broad shield of thick-ribbed ice between ourselves and the radiance of the warm heart of God. Oh! brother; do not shut that love out of your heart; for if you do, you shut out peace and goodness, and shut in all manner of poisonous creatures and doleful shapes, whose companionship will be misery and death.

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